



The BUILDERS

Willis George Emerson

L Baird & Greenwood 756
Hinkel, p. 103

signed
presentation
copy

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30
Complements

to —

Mr. W. S. Bartlett

Very sincerely

the Author

William Emerson

Oct. 1906

127

Very good of it's
Kind 93.

THE BUILDERS

THE BUILDERS

BY
WILLIS GEORGE EMERSON
AUTHOR OF "BUELL HAMPTON"



CHICAGO
FORBES & COMPANY
1906

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BY
WILLIS GEORGE EMERSON

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DEDICATED
TO
W. O. E. AND F. L. E.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The breaking of a twig in some vast forest, and the dull echo of a miner's pick in a rugged mountain canyon, alike suggest the solitude of nature. The unwritten stories of the lives of mining prospectors who search for yellow gold, or the advance builders of civilization in the rich valleys of the West, are replete with interest and dramatic incident.

The Western town builder also plays a most conspicuous part in the drama. The frontier is the exposed nerve of American civilization. The breath of the West, cooled by snow-capped mountain tops, and made fragrant by Nature's fruitful groves, is the ozone of life, stimulating the "trail-blazer" of progress to greater deeds.

The West boasts of no frayed-out remnants of a former greatness. A man here sells for his intrinsic worth—no more, no less. Conditions that made men great in former generations are still active, developing manhood in its highest type.

There is hardly a cross-road hamlet without its hotel, and usually a "Dick Ballard"

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presides. "Brainy men," such as composed the Waterville Town Company, may be found wherever a new town is building, while a "Rufus Grim" is generally the autocrat of a mining-camp.

Occasionally a sturdy miner gives to the world the golden keys to some fabulously rich discovery, while a greater number dedicate their lives to a fruitless search for hidden treasures, and finally die of disappointment and a broken heart.

"Ruth," in her unswerving devotion to her father, is a specimen of young womanhood whose duplicate may be found in many a ranchman's home throughout the nestling valleys of our great West.

Sometimes I imagine I was with "J. Arthur Boast" in his hiding-place, when he wrote that last letter, and saw the spectral ghost that ever kept him company. The retribution was just, perhaps, yet my sympathy lingers around the old prospect shaft—that golden mausoleum of inordinate ambition.

W. G. E

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1906.

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CHAPTER I

A FAIR VISITOR

FRED ROCKWELL had an ambition. The average man is usually satisfied with himself, if not with his fortune, but Fred was not an average man, and his great desire was to be a noted journalist. Already he had learned that patience is the foundation rock of courage, and that both courage and labor are indispensable in rearing ambition's lofty tower.

The sunshine that poured in at his windows disclosed luxurious apartments, indicating refinement and culture. The bric-a-brac, the leathern walls stamped with gilt, the frieze of palm leaves, the chandelier, the richly carved bookcase filled with tawny covered volumes, an upright piano, and a guitar which stood sentinel-like in a retired corner, together with Indian rugs and tiger-skins before an open grate, half hidden by a large Japanese fan, made of this literary man's den a faithful reflex of his thoughts and desires.

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Seated at an open desk, with writing material before him, on the afternoon of a June day, was Fred Rockwell. He was not more than twenty-five, of medium height, dark hair and eyes, a fair complexion, an aquiline nose and a well formed mouth that suggested strength and firmness. His dress and surroundings indicated a rather serious elegance, rich and unaffected.

Before him lay numerous packages of papers, but they were not claiming his attention. He was perusing a note written in a lady's hand.

"Who can she be?" was the exclamation that escaped him as he read the letter.

Tossing it on the table he walked back and forth. He stopped before the mantel and lighted a cigar. "Ruth Hilliard—Ruth Hilliard," he repeated, between puffs of smoke that he blew in rings towards the ceiling. "Where have I met her? Where have I seen or heard that name?"

He took up the letter and read it again.

MURRAY HILL HOTEL, June 18th.

Dear Sir:

We arrived in the city last night. My father wishes me to call on you at three o'clock this afternoon; business of special importance to himself.

Respectfully,

RUTH HILLIARD.

To Fred Rockwell, Esq.

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"No," thought he, "I do not remember Miss Hilliard. It is doubtless very stupid and all that, but if I ever heard the name before it has completely passed from my remembrance. She says three o'clock," and glancing at the French timepiece on his mantel he saw it was about to strike the hour.

Scarcely had the sound of the mellow, cathedral-like alarm died away, when the doorbell clanged out like a harsh echo of the clock's last stroke. The servant brought in a card, bearing the name "Miss Ruth Hilliard," and received instructions to admit the visitor at once.

The rustle of skirts was heard in the hallway. The half-hesitation of the visitor as she stood in the open door suggested momentary confusion, but reassurance seemed to assert itself as she complied with the cordial invitation to enter and be seated.

This beautiful girl of perhaps eighteen years was of medium height, rather slender, and dressed becomingly in a skirt of black, white waist and sailor hat, and carried a parasol of a blue effect. Fastened at her belt was a bunch of fragrant violets.

As she accepted the proffered chair, she bestowed upon the young man standing before her a modest glance from laughing eyes that might have been dangerous to a susceptible man. The parting of her lips disclosed teeth whose whiteness was enhanced

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by the heightened shade of pink which evident embarrassment had brought to her cheeks.

"I called," she stammered, "to see Mr. Rockwell."

"At your service, Miss Hilliard," he replied.

"But, really, are you Mr. Rockwell?"

"I believe," he answered, "that I enjoy that honor."

"It must be," she faltered with increasing embarrassment, "all a mistake."

Notwithstanding his matter-of-fact principles, Fred was very much interested in his visitor. He judged she was either a stranger in the city or a skilled actress. For a brief moment caution ruled, and then the impulses of youth regained the whip.

Persons possessing a delicate appreciation of, and a due regard for, the feelings of others are truly cultured, and Fred was too chivalrous to permit his visitor's confusion to increase. He quickly assured her it was not a very serious mistake, and asked in what way he could be of service, at the same time expressing regret that he did not answer the description of the Mr. Rockwell whom she sought.

"The Mr. Rockwell we know," she replied, "is a much older gentleman than you. He visited father some three years ago at Gold Valley, Idaho, and owns an interest in the Shonbar, my father's mine. We are very eager to see Mr. Rockwell, in fact, we have

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come all the way from Idaho expressly for that purpose.

"My father would have called in person, but was taken ill last night—so ill, indeed, that we found it necessary to summon a physician. We are stopping at the Murray Hill Hotel. I fear father will be greatly disappointed."

While she was speaking, a shade of sadness stole over the usually buoyant face of Fred Rockwell. He was thinking of his father who had passed away only a short time before, and for whom, it was evident, his visitor was seeking. The vessel that holds the spirit of a loved one may be broken, but the perfume of one's good deeds will be wafted on the breeze of memory throughout eternity.

"Now I am beginning to understand," said Fred. "I bear the name of my father who, after spending several months in the mining districts of Idaho, went to California, where he remained almost a year, endeavoring to regain his health. He came home a little less than eight months ago and died a few weeks after his return.

"As his living representative, and in honor of his memory," he continued with feeling, "if there is any way in which he could have served you or Mr. Hiliard, I will volunteer to act in his stead to the extent of my ability."

"You are very kind," she replied, "but I am dis-

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tressed at this intelligence, and know my father will be. We learned to think a great deal of Mr. Rockwell during the few months of his stay at Gold Valley. You can do my father a great service by calling on him."

"That will indeed be a pleasure," replied Fred, in his earnest way. "I am employed on the *Banner*, and my duties will prevent my calling before ten in the morning, but kindly tell your father, at that hour he may expect me."

She had risen while he was speaking, and with a face full of appreciation and sympathy thanked him for the promise, and before he realized what was transpiring the hall door closed and she was gone.

"What a wild flower of the West," he mused. "She looks like a violet herself. I shall not soon forget this bit of femininity. For once, I am thankful for a good memory, and in this particular case it is certainly a violet, decorating the present with wonder and perfuming the future with hope."

The house from which Ruth Hilliard had taken her departure was one overlooking Central Park, in New York City. Frederick Rockwell, the elder, was in his lifetime a successful man of affairs. He had accumulated a fortune while yet in the prime of life, and built for himself this home of luxury and beauty.

He had retired from business in the noonday of his career, intending to devote himself to his wife,

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his son, then a mere child, and his library. Scarcely a year of such enjoyment was allowed him before his wife died, leaving him with his son and his fortune, and it was only natural that he should lavish much attention and wealth upon this child.

As Fred grew to manhood, his father discovered in him an extravagance and recklessness which was sadly at variance with those economic principles to which he, himself, had so consistently adhered.

Fred had stood fairly well in his classes, and after being graduated at Princeton, went abroad, visiting the principal cities of Europe, and spending money in such a lavish way that at the expiration of a year his father summoned him home, remonstrating with him severely on his manner of living, his expensive habits, and insisting that the duty of making and saving up a fortune was as nothing to the responsibility of its proper use.

Piqued at the rebuke, Fred quarreled with his father, and started out to make his way in the world alone. It is hard for a young man in his early twenties to pay in the present for past spendthrift squanderings, unless he can successfully sight-draft the fountain of the future.

The estrangement, however, between Fred and his father was of short duration, and soon after the reconciliation he secured a position on the *Banner*, and assiduously devoted himself to the study of jour-

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nalism. He gave up his follies and fast living, and realized more enjoyment from his work on the *Banner* than he ever found in the elaborate dinners and midnight carousals at his club.

He was conscious of an awakening. One evening in speaking to a friend, he said, "I believe man's greatest ability consists not so much in knowing the limitations of others as one's own limitations; not so much in a knowledge of things as a clear insight into the genius of things; not in thoroughness of common knowledge understood by the many, but rather in expert knowledge understood by the few, which in reality is a thorough knowledge of self. 'Know thyself' is a great text."

"Yes," replied the friend, "Emerson, in his 'Over-soul,' tells us that the world is ours, and to take anything we want, but to remember we must pay for it."

"We men of the world," said Fred thoughtfully, "boast that we are always ready to pay for so-called Bohemian happiness, but I have observed, and profited by the observation, that the pendulum invariably swings as far back the next morning as it went abnormally forward the night before. We pay double; we pay in gold, and not infrequently, in a loss of self respect."

CHAPTER II

THE OLD MINER

FRED ROCKWELL'S house had been his home from childhood. The senior Rockwell had invested his surplus income in real estate, and after the lapse of years found himself possessed of a fortune many times greater than he had ever anticipated. He traveled much through the West, and at Gold Valley, Idaho, had found in Ben Hilliard, the owner of the Shonbar mine—or, rather, prospect claim—a playmate of his youth.

Benjamin Hilliard had staked out a claim which he named the "Shonbar" and had worked away with pick and shovel for many years, believing that some day he would "strike it rich," and from the output of other mining properties in that vicinity it seemed that his hopes might be realized.

He deeded a half interest in this mining property to his friend, Rockwell, in consideration of certain moneys advanced for its development. This was the only property interest Mr. Rockwell owned outside of New York City, and it is quite probable he made this investment not so much in the hope of a pecuniary return as a desire to assist his boyhood

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friend. Real friendship is at all times a marvelous thing, and is as different from the spurious article as high grade ore from country rock.

The deed which Mr. Hilliard gave him had been duly recorded, but during his travels on the Pacific Coast he had in some way mislaid it, and upon his return to New York City died without having mentioned the matter to his son.

Fred found that his father had left not only a fortune, but also a will, the date of which showed it to have been executed during the months of their estrangement. The important part of the will was a clause limiting Fred to an annuity of five thousand dollars, providing he remained at the Gotham homestead and gave employment to an old Scotch housekeeper and her husband; but the title to the vast property which he owned was not to pass to Fred until he was forty years of age.

To the credit of the son, it may be said that he entertained no enmity towards his father because of this provision, but regarded it as simple justice. In the meantime, he devoted himself with more energy than ever to his profession, was economical in his habits, and had the consolation of knowing that he was being advanced from time to time on the *Banner*, until he was now regarded as one of the most trusted men on that great journal.

To be a member of the *Banner* staff of news-

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gatherers was a position to be envied by those similarly employed on less imposing journals. Fred's associates, the city editor, the religious editor, the dramatic critic, and the heads of several other departments, were in the habit of discussing the topics of the times from a strictly democratic standpoint with the regularity with which day follows night.

The "Old Man" or managing editor, who prided himself upon his ability to recognize and command intellectual forces, could not have had a deeper interest in the columns of the *Banner* than did his faithful coterie of assistants.

With the breaking of every dawn a new paper, filled with information gathered from the four corners of the earth, is ushered into life, teeming with the world's history of a day, to be discussed by the banker, the politician, and professional and non-professional classes over the breakfast table. Every issue is a daily chronicle possessing a soul and character distinctly its own. Before high noon of each day a morning newspaper has generally served its purpose—died—is a thing of the past, and the record of the events found in its columns becomes history.

The following morning at ten o'clock Fred Rockwell was at the Murray Hill Hotel, and sent up his card to Mr. Hilliard. Instead of receiving him in his rooms, the old gentleman joined Fred in the lobby. He was a typical character; once seen never

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to be forgotten. A Virginian by birth and education, with, perhaps, some of the vices of the old school, which were more than counterbalanced by his courtly gracious virtues, his wisdom came to him through his unconscious practice of the simple life, while his considerate thoughtfulness for others caused him to accept the least attentions with the same ease and evident appreciation of one whose culture began long ago among ancestry.

He still retained the polish peculiar to the South, while his many years of Western life had not been able wholly to destroy his love of stilted courtliness. In stature he was fully six feet, and rather portly; his oval face was smooth shaven. He wore his hair somewhat long and the rim of his black hat was as broad as a sombrero. His frock coat was of an old-time date, and suggested a revival of ancient gentility.

"Glad to see you, suh; I am delighted to meet a son of my old friend, Colonel Rockwell."

He clasped Fred's hand warmly, and his face was full of sympathy as he referred to the recent information he had received concerning Mr. Rockwell's demise. They soon found seats in a retired corner of the lobby, and after assuring Fred that he had entirely recovered from his recent indisposition, the old gentleman plunged into business.

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"You know of cou'se, suh, that your father owned a one-half interest in the Shonbar?"

"I was not aware of the fact until your daughter mentioned it to me yesterday," replied Fred.

"You surprise me, suh, you really do," said the old miner, "but it is true nevertheless, and the deed is on record; but what is more, suh, the Shonbar is destined to be the richest gold mine in Idaho. I haven't been doin' much prayin', but I have been workin' away mighty hard for many years to uncover the treasure boxes that will be found in the Shonbar. Kept right at it, winter and summer, for eleven years, and while I have not struck it yet, so far I have been equal to the pay-roll, and therefo' I am still master of the situation; but, I must confess, suh, money, ready money, is gettin' mighty scarce. I am positive, suh, that if I had a little more money with which to push my work, my most sanguine expectations would be more'n realized.

"We are now on the two-hundred-foot level, but it seems, suh, that it isn't deep enough. A most wonderful showin', suh, in my opinion, will be made when the three-hundred-foot level is reached, and we have cross-cut into the vein."

"I am not very well versed in mining matters," said Fred, in a hesitating way; "in fact, I know next to nothing about them. Of course, if I am half

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owner of a gold mine, I naturally am interested in having it developed."

"Well, suh," said the old Southerner, "you see, I am a miner. It is probably impossible for a man to be on the right side of every question, but he should manage to be on the right side of some of them, and I surely believe, suh, that I am on the right side of this one. I know all about mines. Yes, suh, I assure you, on my honor, that I can tell 'pay-ore' as far as I can see it, if I am sixty-five years old.

"You see, suh," he continued, "let us suppose this table is the top of the mountain. Now, where I place this inkstand is the Shonbar, just beyond here, where I lay this penstock, is the Peacock mine. It joins us directly on the nawth. The Excelsior is at this point, where I lay my eye-glass case, directly south of the Shonbar. Both of them, suh, are payin' immense dividends, and before a year, with proper management, the Shonbar will be doin' the same.

"What we must do, suh, is to sink the shaft on the Shonbar to the three-hundred-foot level, and we will cross-cut into a vein of wealth, suh, that will make you rich as a Vanderbilt. Yes, suh, take my word for it.

"Now," he continued, "there's old Grim. He owns the majority of the stock in the Peacock, or at least he claims he does, and he wanted to buy the

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Shonbar, but when he learned, suh, that I owned only a half interest, he refused to talk any more with me about it. He said he wanted all or none. Grim is one of those fellows that never want more'n a single slice of their neighbor's bread, unless they see it comin' their way, then they want the whole loaf and the bakery thrown in for good measure. Confidentially, Mr. Rockwell, there are people in the world who put in plenty of time prayin', askin' that their neighbors act on the square, just so they can do a little crooked work on the side, while their neighbors are to'tin' fair, and that's Rufus Grim, barrin' the fact that he never prays. Why, suh, he isn't on good terms with himself more'n one day out of the week, and I consider him the most ill-mannered man in the Fish River minin' district. We miners, suh, generally form a pretty correct idea of sterlin' manhood.

"I've been minin' now for thirty years, and while I've never 'struck it,' yet I assure you, suh, that I have my reasons for absolute confidence in the Shonbar."

"Of course, Mr. Hilliard," said Fred, "I know nothing about your technical expressions of 'sinking shafts,' 'cross-cutting,' 'drifting,' and all that sort of thing, but I remember my father speaking of you on several occasions, and I do not doubt, if he were living, he would gladly help you in any way

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possible. Personally, my means are limited, but if your wants are not too great, I will gladly lend my assistance."

"Give me your hand, suh. Why, Mr. Rockwell, you're a gentleman I'm proud to meet, suh, a Rockwell of the old school, belongin' to one of the oldest and proudest families of Virginia. Now, you have a half interest in the Shonbar, and if you can furnish the money, Mr. Rockwell, to sink the shaft to the three-hundred-foot level, I will go back to Gold Valley and immediately commence the work, and mind, Mr. Rockwell, I give you my word of honor, suh, that you'll never lose a dollar. No, suh, the Shonbar is a sure winner. The claim is patented, and our title is perfect; but we must do more, suh, we must sink our shaft, and it costs money to sink shafts, and powerful hard work in the bargain, suh.

"I came to New York especially to see your father, and have him help me by advancin' a little more money. He paid me one thousand dollars, suh, for a half interest in the Shonbar. I told him, and I tell you, suh, it will bring you a million. Yes, suh, I pledge you my word it will."

The old gentleman's words, his enthusiasm, his courtliness, and his unmistakable belief in the Shonbar, enthused Fred in anticipation of his half ownership in a gold mine. He mentally computed the amount of money he had, and felt he would will-

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ingly check out his last dollar to sink the shaft in the Shonbar to the three-hundred-foot level.

He had to his credit in the Chemical National Bank some sixteen thousand dollars, and hesitatingly asked Mr. Hilliard how much it would take to do the work.

"Why, you see, suh," replied the old gentleman, "the more a fellow has, the quicker he can sink the shaft. Now, I could get along at present with, say, fifteen hundred dollars, but two thousand would be better, and twenty-five hundred dollars would be a greatest sufficiency."

"Very well," replied Fred, "I'll advance you twenty-five hundred dollars, and can bring it to you in a couple of hours."

The old gentleman was delighted with Fred's ready acquiescence in the matter, and again insisted on shaking his hand and assuring him he was a true Virginian.

Fred took his leave, hurried to the bank, and in less than two hours returned and handed Mr. Hilliard twenty-five hundred dollars. The old gentleman was very urgent in his hospitality, insisting that Fred remain and take luncheon with him, but on account of a business engagement Fred was unable to do so.

"My Ruth, suh," said the old miner, "will be delighted to meet you again. Now, suh, there's one

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girl in a thousand. She stays with her old daddy and has just as much faith in the ultimate outcome of the Shonbar as I have. I sometimes think, suh, that I ought not to keep her among the hills and mountains, so far from civilization, so to speak, but she says, 'We'll wait, daddy, until we strike it.' I assure you, suh, she's a wonderful comfort to me."

Fred invited Mr. Hilliard to bring his daughter and stop at his house for a few days, but the old miner explained that his stay could not be prolonged; that he was impatient to begin work on the mine, sinking the shaft to the three-hundred-foot level, and then commence cross-cutting. He insisted that he must start for Gold Valley on the evening train.

Ascending to the parlor, Fred waited until Mr. Hilliard brought his daughter to bid him good-bye. As she came into the room with her stately father, Fred was conscious of an effort in trying to convince himself that such a beautiful girl could have grown to young womanhood among the mountains of the Northwest.

She was carrying a bunch of violets in her hand, and he began to associate the girl with her seemingly favorite flower.

"I hope you have enjoyed your trip to New York," said Fred.

"Thank you," she replied, "the trip was in-

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tensely interesting, and so is the city, what little I have seen of it, but I feel restless here—a want of outdoor freedom. What I miss most is the smell of the pines that so ladens the air of Gold Valley.”

“Yes,” replied Fred, “but we have the violets, and, perhaps, you have none in Gold Valley.”

“Very true,” said Ruth, as she lifted the purple beauties and inhaled their fragrance. “No one can understand how dearly I love these little flowers. If only we had them in the hills, among our pines, and our beautiful scenery, I am sure I would never care to come away.”

“You are loyal to Idaho.”

“No,” she replied quickly and smilingly, “only loyal to truth. Really,” she went on, “it is a compliment, is it not, to your Eastern world, that my point of view has not been a critical one?”

Without hesitation he agreed, and soon after was hurrying along the street towards the *Banner* office, but for many days there remained with Fred Rockwell the blended fragrance of Western hills and violets, and the tender memory of one who he half believed might have “tuned his song” and turned his life to stronger endeavor—to nobler purposes. But at such times he would put the thought gently from him as if it were the idle fancy of a day-dream.

CHAPTER III

THE "BANNER" FORCE

A GREAT metropolitan journal like the *Banner* has a tendency to absorb all individuality into one composite whole. A man may be never so clever with his pen and contribute the most readable articles to the paper day after day and year after year, and yet not one reader in ten thousand has any idea whose composition he is perusing.

Fred Rockwell was only one of the force, and was a favorite with his associates. He dreamed of promotion and the time when he should be a correspondent of note, or, possibly, the head of some important department on that great paper. Visions of special work which would call him not only to different parts of his own country, but to foreign lands as well, charmed him into contentment and renewed energy.

Only once during his employment on the *Banner* had he made anything like a "hit." He had on one occasion succeeded in "scooping" the other New York journals in a most masterly manner. Indeed, to Fred belonged the credit of having completely

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humiliated the other dailies with a double-leaded featured article under flaming headlines.

As a compensation, he was sent for by the chief and received the special thanks of that august personage. This was a mark of distinction, for it was seldom that the chief praised any one, but, on the other hand, if the work was not up to standard, the staff generally heard from him in a volley of profanity that caused them to doubt both his orthodoxy and the permanency of their positions.

On the night after Mr. Hilliard and Ruth started for Gold Valley, Fred found himself thinking a good deal about the Shonbar.

To a young man of twenty-five, fifteen years seems a long time to wait for the possession of his property; then, too, there is a certain fascination about the idea of owning a gold mine, and this charm had taken possession of Fred to such a degree that between the lines of copy he found himself speculating on the future and building castles in the air.

The half interest which his father owned in the Shonbar had not been named in the will, and as Fred was the only heir, it naturally occurred to him that in case the old miner should “strike it rich,” he would find himself with a handsome competency long before his fortieth birthday.

For the first time during the years of his con-

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nection with the *Banner*, a feeling of dissatisfaction stole over him. Fred was glad that Mr. Hilliard had been so prompt in returning to Gold Valley, for he felt that the sinking of the shaft in the Shonbar should be commenced at the earliest possible moment.

There was also a feeling of regret far down in his heart that he had not found an opportunity to know more of the fair Ruth, the remembrance of whose laughing blue eyes, almost the color of the violets she loved so well, and perfect freedom from affectation, hovered near him with a distinctness he had never before experienced with any of his female acquaintances.

He was in this state of mind when the police reporter came in, declaring he was disgusted with the scarcity of crime.

"I say, Freddie, it's getting to be a pretty pass when a fellow has to rummage all over the city for a few crumbs of accidental deaths, heartless murders, street brawls, or shooting affairs."

Before Fred had time to reply, the religious editor began swearing about the uninteresting sermons he was of late compelled to report.

The dramatic critic observed that he presumed writing sermons was rather stupid business at best, but if the reading public could endure them, the re-

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religious editor ought to be able to do so at sixty dollars a week.

"By Jupiter, old boy, you're about right," said the religious editor, as he begged a light for his brier-root pipe from the dramatic critic, saying that he did not know with whom he would rather mix smoke than a representative of the footlights. He then clapped Fred on the shoulder in a jocular way, and said:

"Freddie, old boy, what makes you so glum?"

"Scoops are scarce," replied Fred, without raising his eyes from the copy he was revising.

"Scarce!" chimed in the city editor, "I should say so. We have not had such a thing as a scoop about the office for months; however, I reckon we should be such creative geniuses that we could take an old story and redress it so cleverly that it would not be recognized even by its own author; but it does keep one hustling to fool the people all the time, and entertain them as well."

"Journalism," interposed the dramatic critic, "is the most potential power on earth. In some ways it is the noblest work among men. It is a mirror that dramatizes the daily history of civilization. Instead of moulding, it creates public sentiment. It may be the making or the undoing of earthly ambition. It plucks from, or places stars in, the firmament of the theatrical heavens. Indeed,

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journalism is another name for progress. The very lightning from the throne of Jove is robbed to assist in telling to mankind the daily story of this grand old world of ours."

"Bravo!" said the police reporter.

"I am beginning to believe," said Fred, "that journalism is pure drudgery, without hope of reward, and there is no refuge from its dreariness but the hardest and most constant work."

"Why, Fred, you astonish me," replied the religious editor. "A fellow with as bright a future in the profession as you, making such a remark as that, causes me to think you are growing cynical, dear boy, and cynics are only old, dilapidated furnaces with the fires burned out. Think of the opportunities which journalism affords."

"What opportunities," inquired Fred, "have you or I or any other member of this staff, excepting those of which we have no right to take advantage? I freely admit that there is a fascination about the profession of journalism, an influence, if you please, that holds us in the rut, much the same as the current of a mighty river—always draws everything into the center where the water is swiftest—but the individuality of the most talented among us is completely absorbed by the great octopus that we are daily and nightly striving with our best efforts of brawn and brain to keep supplied with news."

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"Good!" shouted the police reporter, "there is not an ordinary prize fighter in the land but has more individual reputation than any of us. Fred is right in what he says."

At this point in their conversation a note was handed to Rockwell. It was a polite request to report at the chief's private room at ten o'clock the next morning. After hastily glancing over it, Fred read it aloud.

"I say, Freddie, that's a little rough. However, don't look through blue glasses," said the religious editor, between vigorous puffs at his pipe, "it may be a step up."

It was an open question with the members of the force whether a formal summons into the presence of the chief, without any intimation of the nature of the interview, was a good omen or otherwise.

"Possibly," responded Fred, "but I rather surmise it to be a step out."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," observed the dramatic critic. "It's twelve o'clock, boys; let us adjourn to the lunch-room and talk over the chief's letter."

A half dozen of as jolly young fellows as could be found anywhere were soon seated around a table at Tortoni's cafe, partaking of the stereotyped newspaper man's luncheon.

As a result of their deliberations, there were

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many hopeful expressions for the benefit of Fred, but there was, however, an unspoken undercurrent of general belief that his interview with the chief would not result satisfactorily, and Fred was not slow to share this feeling.

A silence fell upon the group. Presently Fred said, in a half thinking-out-loud sort of way: "Boys, our love for things and people we are about to lose increases in proportion as the danger of separation becomes apparent, doesn't it? Editors are really the world's noblest soldiers, for they most zealously guard the characters and morals not only of individuals, but entire communities, and I am beginning to appreciate you and the work, as I fear there is some danger of having to cut it all."

His observations were silently seconded by his co-laborers as they returned to their respective desks.

When the day's work had been finished, and Fred hurried for his elevated train that night, he thought again of demure little Ruth, a decidedly charming product of the Western hills. With her had come into his life in some unaccountable way, a suggestion of hope—perhaps only a transitory one—stimulated, possibly, by the enthusiasm of her father. He did not pause to analyze the sustaining assurance that he experienced; he only knew it was a comforting consolation that took off the keen edge

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of the depression that he otherwise would have felt concerning his coming interview with his chief.

Arriving at his rooms, he sat before the open grate fire, looking into the future through the red flame of prophetic vision.

Picking up a pencil, he wrote these lines :

"A wondrous love coming into an empty heart—a beautiful love that burns and glows and radiates with mirthful gladness, often effects a transformation in the soul of a lonely man to a degree that is little less than miraculous."

CHAPTER IV

A SUPPER PARTY

AT ten o'clock the following morning Fred sent his card to the chief, and was immediately admitted.

"Good morning, Mr. Rockwell."

"Good morning," was Fred's prompt reply.

"I sent for you," said the chief, as he industriously looked over a bundle of papers on his desk, "to discuss a matter I have had in mind for some time."

"Yes," was Fred's laconic reply.

The chief finding the paper for which he was evidently searching, motioned Fred to be seated, and turning to him, asked, "Have you ever traveled much in the West?"

"I have never been west of Buffalo."

"Your work," observed the chief, "has been very satisfactory—I may say, especially so—and while individual reputation is merely a drop in the vastness of a journal's honor, it is the policy of the *Banner* not only to reward those who have talent, but also to keep pace with the times, and give its

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readers reliable information upon all questions of moment and importance.

“The most sought after thing in the literary world is to find someone who can write something new. The great Northwest has been opening up for the last half century. There have been booms and counter-booms spasmodically in that country for many years, and a great number of fortunes have been lost by ill-advised investors, but I am not personally familiar with any one who has bettered his condition in Western speculations.

“Just at the present time, the Northwest is, as you are doubtless aware, attracting considerable attention, and the effort to popularize it through the press seems unabating. Our Eastern people, even some of our oldest families in New York, are becoming poisoned by the virus of Western investments.

“You know the man who boasts most of his own judgment is generally the readiest to accept the judgment of others, and my private opinion is that instead of receiving dividends on these Western holdings, they will lose principal and all.

“Now,” continued he, “we want a level-headed correspondent to visit that Western country. Kindly observe I say ‘level-headed,’ for the reason that very frequently an Eastern man, especially if he is unacquainted with the wonderland of the West,

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loses his head and becomes won over by the fairy tales of prospective wealth as told by the average real estate broker.

"The only Eastern money that ever returns, as far as I am informed, comes in the shape of alleged dividends on a vacuum that is paid out of the Eastern man's original investment, and these so-called dividends are sent East only as a further bait to increase the allurements of the mirage.

"You, Mr. Rockwell," continued the chief, eyeing Fred with great directness, "have been selected for this important position of trust. I might modify my remarks," he continued, as if it were an afterthought, "by saying there are places in the West of which the reports are worthy of credence, possessing real merit; but in nine cases out of ten the new towns that are springing up throughout the Northwestern portion of the United States are as intangible as the will-o'-the-wisp.

"Our people are creatures of impulse, and it is our duty in our official positions on the *Banner* to disabuse their minds of this fad for speculation.

"In short, there is entirely too much Eastern capital flowing into those wildcat Western speculations, and we desire to give a series of letters to the readers of the *Banner*, descriptive of that country, containing the facts stripped of all enchantment,

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and dissuade them, if possible, from such unstable investments as are too frequently being made.

"Of course, any one can see and criticise a mistake after it is made; true newspaper talent consists in not making them. I deem these few suggestions necessary for your good in governing the character of your correspondence.

"Time cannot remedy the mistakes of a great journal, Mr. Rockwell, or regain for it the loss of caste and prestige, which an error, especially regarding financial matters, invariably entails.

"I shall expect you to be ready to start tomorrow evening, on the six o'clock train. As you will probably be away for some time, it would be well for you to arrange your private affairs accordingly. Call tomorrow at eleven o'clock, and I will have ready the necessary credentials, transportation, and written instructions."

Fred bowed his acquiescence and turned to go, when the chief said:

"By the way, as money is a sort of bristling interrogation point that decorates the conclusion of all written or spoken understandings where labor and capital are involved, you will receive one hundred dollars a week and expenses, instead of forty dollars as heretofore, which increase I hope you will consider satisfactory."

Fred attempted to express his appreciation of the

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confidence reposed, but the chief waved him aside, muttering something to the effect that "time is money," and turned at once to the other affairs which were demanding his attention.

That afternoon Fred was not found among the staff, and a new man occupied his chair.

He called on Robert Ainsley, the attorney who had represented the Rockwell family for years, and explained to him his promotion, telling him that he would start for the West the next evening.

His associates at the *Banner* office were questioning one another as to what had transpired between Fred and the chief, but no one seemed to know anything about it, except that a new man was on duty and Fred was absent.

At half past eleven o'clock that night the dramatic critic hurried in from the street and passed the word around among the coterie that a surprise was waiting for them over at Tortoni's cafe.

Tortoni's has been for many years a favorite resort for newspaper men. Fred Rockwell was well known to the manager as a member of the *Banner* staff, and when that afternoon he requested that a luncheon, something better than ordinary, be prepared, he was assured that everything would be in readiness.

The dramatic critic ushered his associates into a private dining-room of the cafe at precisely twelve

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o'clock. Fred was waiting and a warm greeting was exchanged. The religious editor declared he believed a conspiracy of gigantic proportions had been laid to entrap the meek and lowly, but nevertheless, he took his place with alacrity and proceeded to enjoy the modest but excellent luncheon prepared.

A few bottles of rare old wine added to the interesting surprise Fred had arranged. When the glasses had been filled and drained, the political editor moved that an explanation was in order.

"My friends," said Fred, "the most important disclosure I have to make is that my salary has been raised to one hundred dollars a week, and while the honor of the promotion may have its disadvantages in compelling me to travel to a distant part of the country, yet we cannot help remembering that money is a mighty good thing, and that it takes the gold coin of the realm to pay for the hot bird and the cold bottle."

The religious editor shouted and fell from his chair, declaring that startling surprises were not only the salt and pepper, but the tabasco seasoning of life itself, and that his nerves were so unstrung by Fred's statement regarding his increase in salary, that it certainly would take another glass of wine to restore them.

After Fred had narrated at some length his in-

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terview with his chief, he received the hearty congratulations of his associates. Each vied with the other in wishing him unbounded success.

"I understand," said the political editor, after clearing his throat with another glass of wine, "that the West is teeming with possibilities in a political and business way, and I should not be surprised if the Honorable Fred Rockwell were next heard of as mayor of some municipality in the Rocky Mountain region, or, possibly, a member of Congress from the Third District."

"Or, better still," observed the religious editor, "president of one of the bonanza gold mines that advertise themselves as being the greatest dividend paying properties in the world."

"That's right, boys, cheer me up," said Fred, smiling. "I really believe a reckless indulgence in hope is the least bad form of dissipation with which I am acquainted."

"What's the matter," said the police reporter, "with being moderate in your expectations? Suppose Fred secured the position of judge of the police court in one of those Western towns; where a dozen to twenty drunks or brawls occur every twenty-four hours—ye gods! What a country for rich morsels of crime!"

The opinion of all seemed to be that Fred would

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find abundant opportunities for making investments here and there in the growing West that would increase his financial prospects.

"One hundred dollars," said the dramatic critic, as he finished his third glass of wine, "is quite a step up, but evidently a mere bagatelle to the 'pick ups' on the side in a country that is just now in the morning of its development, as the West is at the present time.

"Remember, it is fear, not judgment, Rockwell, that usually prevents men from making more mistakes than they do. Be bold and daring is my advice, and you will return a rich man."

That Fred was one of the luckiest fellows living was the verdict of all his associates. The luncheon over and a final good-night glass of wine drunk to Fred's success, the force returned to their work and Fred was driven rapidly up Eighth Avenue to Central Park, West.

Upon reaching his home he began to feel more than ever that a great honor had been thrust upon him. Gratitude to his chief was unbounded, but like the young and ambitious everywhere, his own personal advancement in a financial way was a consideration not to be overlooked. While he knew personally very little about the Western country, the many allusions of his companions to the rare

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opportunities awaiting him in the new world he was about to visit filled him with a vague, indescribable sense of importance.

“The man in whom others believe is a power, but if he believes in himself he is doubly powerful,” was one of his favorite maxims.

As he retired for the night he said to himself that Gold Valley, Idaho, would be one of his objective points, and he hoped to be there when the shaft reached the three-hundred-foot level. He was beginning to share in the old miner’s enthusiasm and confidence in the Shonbar.

He drifted away in a restful sleep, while visions of a beautiful girl in early womanhood, with soulful blue eyes, “gentle grace and sovereign sweetness,” rose in a dream cloud before him, and he fancied a south wind was blowing towards him over a bank of waving violets.

In every sincere and earnest man’s heart God has placed a little niche where the poetic, the speculative and the legendary hold full sway. From out of this corner come the dreams of our lives—night dreams and day dreams—castles are built, hopes are realized as soon as we are conscious of the desire. The sorrowful are made glad, the halt are healed, the poor become princes, the sightless see, the homeless are housed, and all mankind become lovers. Be-

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wildering are these dream castles,—but with the awakening—like the Arabs who fold their tents and silently steal away, these dreams dissolve before the practical and ruder things of earth.

CHAPTER V

AN ODD CHARACTER

A TRIP from New York to the inter-mountain country of the West, with the present railroad facilities of comfortable Pullman and dining-cars, is now an every-day affair. As the train rumbled through dell and forest, Fred Rockwell was pleased more than ever that he had received the assignment. Across broad stretches of picturesque valley country rushed the train, now and again dashing over bridges spanning beautiful streams, some of which were calm and peaceful, others hurrying madly along, breaking into white spray, rippling over rocky places and then leaping forward again as if running a race with time.

As the train approached the Rocky Mountains, and Fred for the first time gazed upon that mighty range of Nature's towering masonry, he was quite overawed with the barren vastness that stretched away in distant solitude, adorned only with broken columns and fragments of gigantic rocks of many and beautiful colors, thrown together in massive yet abandoned grandeur.

Notwithstanding his enjoyment of this new and

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varied scenery, he was glad enough to leave the cars at Butte City, Montana, after four days and nights of continuous travel.

Butte City is said to be not only the largest mining camp in Montana, but one of the greatest in the world. It boasts of many millions in ore that are annually brought to the light of day by the magic wand of the miner's pick.

Fred secured lodging at the Mercury Hotel, and the next morning, after a hearty breakfast, started for a walk.

The town is built on a side-hill, gently rising from the railroad station grounds to the westward until a considerable elevation is attained. He paused now and then to inspect the architecture of some of the buildings, and looking away towards the smelter districts, he was amazed at the black clouds of smoke which belched forth from the chimneys and settled over the city like a veil of mourning.

He was presently accosted by an individual with a grizzly beard and a most good-natured countenance, who said, "Hello, pardner; how d'ye do? Sizin' up these 'ere diggin's, be you?"

Fred eyed the questioner rather critically, and acknowledged the salutation. The fellow handed him a card which bore the name "Marc Casey."

"I reckon," he said, "you be from down East? I come from thar' a long time ago. You'll notice

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from my card that I'm in the real estate business, also have some fine minin' propositions."

"Yes," said Fred, "I am from down East, but I do not care to make investments."

"Well, now, look'ee here, stranger, I 'spect I might give you a p'inter or two that may not come amiss. This 'ere town is chuck full of blacklegs and dead beats, who make it their business to run every feller in that comes from down East. Now, Marc Casey does a straight forward, legitimate business—that's me," said he, as he tucked his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and straightened himself to his fullest height.

Fred was amused at this odd character, and determined to learn from him what he could concerning Butte City and its resources. He therefore asked, "What population have you, and what is the principal business?"

"Over fifty thousand people, above and below. You see, thar's several thousand of us in this 'ere town below ground, workin' away with shovel and pick. I reckon as you'll see a fair sample of our miners, if you're on the street tonight.

"As for resources—why, pardner, thar's no end to 'em. We took out mighty near forty million dollars in gold from our mines last year, and there's ore enough in sight to keep on minin' at the same

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rate for a hundred years to come. What d'ye think of that?"

Fred said it was a most extraordinary record. "What other towns have you in this state of similar advantages?"

"None to speak of," was the prompt reply. "Butte City is the peertest town of any in these Western diggin's. Thar's not another town in Montana that can tech one side of it, for money, marbles or chalk. To be sure," he went on, in a conciliatory tone, "we have lots of towns in this 'ere State, sech as they be; lots of minin' camps, but they're merely blacksmith-shops-at-the-cross-roads compared to Butte City.

"D'ye see that corner over thar'? Five years ago I owned the ground whar' that buildin' stands. I bought it for three hundred dollars, held it just three months, and sold it for four thousand dollars; spot cash."

"That was an immense profit," said Fred, with more interest than he had as yet manifested in Marc Casey's description of Butte City. Casey smiled contentedly and expectorated an accumulation of tobacco juice on the sidewalk with a resounding "pit-tew," saying:

"You call that a good profit? Why, pardner, I bought stock in the Blackbird mine at twelve cents a share, when the company was fust organized, and

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now it's worth three hundred dollars a share and payin' an immense dividend monthly. That's what I call a good investment; but as fur that spec," said he, jerking his thumb over his shoulder at the corner lot, "that don't amount to nothin'."

"Do you know where Gold Valley, Idaho, is?" asked Fred.

"I guess I ought to know," replied the boomer. "Me and Gideon Gibbons were the fust prospectors in that neck of the woods. Gideon and me claim to own the Peacock mine, but opportunity is mighty like a healthy, fat pig with a short tail, 'tain't every man who grabs it can hold on, and old Rufus Grim, the biggest scoundrel in Idaho, yes, the biggest in this hull minin' country, claims to own it, and has got possession, and I've learned in this Western country especially that possession is not only nine p'int's of the law, but mighty near ten.

"Of couse, a gold mine like the Peacock is a mighty handy thing to have in the family, but as a general rule they're mighty unsartin. Give me a silver or copper mine every time."

Marc Casey was an insistent fellow. When he donned a sombrero, a pair of newly purchased high-heeled boots, and walked down the streets of Butte City, you were impressed with the fact that he resembled in every way a well inflated pneumatic tire, and on this particular day he was wearing a new,

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broad-brimmed sombrero, while the buttons on his buckskin coat were made of five dollar gold pieces—he was on dress parade and considered himself irresistible.

Fred assured his new found acquaintance that he was under many obligations for the information received, and hoped to meet him again. Marc Casey, however, was not to be disposed of in this way, and followed along with Fred.

He called his attention to some vacant lots, and said: “D’ye see them lots over thar’? I can sell you one of them fifty-foot lots at thirty-five hundred dollars, and I’ll bet diamonds against doughnuts it’ll be a rich buy at ten thousand dollars before two years. By the way, stranger, what’s the matter with you takin’ a little ‘flyer’ in Butte City dirt? Buy a few lots, stop here with us for six months, sell ’em again for a hundred per cent profit, and that’ll pay all the expenses of your Western trip. See?” said he, touching Fred gently in the ribs with his elbow.

“Yes, I see,” said Fred, smiling, “I see very clearly, or would, were it not for the smoke. It smells like sulphur. Does it come from some of your mills or smelters?”

“Now, look’ee here, pard; you’re just like every other down-easter. They’re always kickin’ about this smoke. Let me tell you, if we didn’t have this ’ere smoke we wouldn’t have any Butte City, and,

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besides, it kills the bacteria, microbes, and all that sort of thing. It's mighty healthy here, I can tell you, an' a mighty pert town in the bargain. No use talkin', the hut of the frontier feller has p'int of advantage about it that you Eastern fellers who live in the high falutinist sort of Vanderbiltian castles never even dreamed about."

Fred coughed immoderately, but Marc Casey assured him that he was at that very minute inhaling the healthiest air that ever filled his lungs.

In the course of their walk, the boomer kept up an increasing conversation, explaining different points of interest, pointing out mining properties and telling their names, until Fred felt he was very fortunate in falling in with one so conversant with Butte City.

At parting, Fred bade him good-day, and promised to call at his office before leaving the city.

There are men who regard themselves in their respective neighborhoods as the only kernel of wheat in the entire sack, yet when subjected to the fanning mill of separation they usually fly away with the first breath of the fan, and form the beginning of the chaff pile. Marc Casey impressed Fred as being this sort of a happy-go-lucky fellow.

When he returned to the hotel he began his first letter to the *Banner*, but it was not finished until late that night.

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When it appeared in the great New York paper it surprised in point of cleverness and interest even his warmest friends. His descriptions were so vivid and lifelike, his characters so droll, and withal teeming with information, that a score of letters came to the managing editor, assuring him of the great pleasure and profit they had experienced in the perusal of the article.

Fred knew nothing of this at the time, but devoted himself with increasing diligence to seeking reliable information, and using the material for his weekly letters.

Butte City began to impress him as a place of greater importance than he had at first thought. It was a town without a prototype. Over fifty thousand people swarmed the hills in search of hidden treasure. In a way, it was a vast solitude of many hills, apart, yet in touch with the world. Something—perhaps the sulphur smoke—destroyed the miasma of gossip and intrigue.

Of course, differences arose, but when these differences became personal, both parties to the misunderstanding whipped out their guns, and shot to the death. The survivor, provided either escaped, went calmly on, untrammelled by fear, feuds, or future fights.

Nice distinctions and questions of morality that occupy so much of the time of gossip-mongers in

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older communities, where jealousies and acquired and inherited hatreds flourish, find no place in the broad, progressive West—perhaps it were better if a higher standard existed. Here the sunshine, the smell of pines, the perfume of sand lilies, the ozone of health, are all wafted up from verdant valleys and down from snow-covered peaks, satisfying the very souls of men—they become marked with the frankincense of Nature's God—both inspiring and wholesome.

Fred felt all this—he knew the old East, and was beginning to learn the new West. He was informed that almost a million dollars were paid monthly to the miners alone, and they, as a class, were “hail fellows well met,” who believed in the doctrine of keeping money in circulation.

Fred noticed in many of the mercantile houses that when the day clerks went off at six o'clock in the evening, another set of clerks came on, and the shops and stores, by the aid of brilliant electric lights, continued business twenty-four hours a day, the year round.

He often thought of his conversation with the managing editor, and what he had said about Western towns and the over-enthusiastic town boomer. He wondered, if his chief were to see Butte City, if he would not somewhat modify his radical statements.

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In Marc Casey was found a typical character that fully came up to the managing editor's idea, and Fred frequently used him as an example in his letters to the *Banner*. But he was becoming more and more convinced that Butte City was a solid, substantial place, such as the managing editor had classed as an exception to the rule.

He was becoming acclimated—he was making the sacrifice of assimilation. The bleak hills, the brown landscape, the sand ridges and even the thick sulphur smoke appealed less to his preconceived prejudices, and more to the newly formed judgment that was taking root and building the bulwark of a conviction. Destiny was reaching out her arms to him, but he saw not. He was drifting in the birch-bark canoe of youth.

CHAPTER VI

A VISIT TO WATERVILLE

ABOUT two weeks after Fred Rockwell arrived in Butte City he noticed one morning that every one was talking about a new town, and each was asking the other what he thought about it. Glancing at the hotel register he saw the name, Wilbur Winthrop of Waterville, Idaho.

In looking over the *Butte City Miner* and the *Inter-Mountain Blade*, both well edited and healthy dailies, he was somewhat astonished to find a full-page advertisement, setting forth in blazing splendor the great Thief River Valley, in each of the papers, signed by Wilbur Winthrop, as agent, announcing that he would be at the Mercury Hotel for a short time, and inviting those who were interested in investing a little money in a purely agricultural city, free from the unstable inflation of a mining camp, to come early, and "get in on the ground floor."

The advertisement represented Waterville as being in the midst of the great Thief River Valley, with the largest water power in the country, surrounded by an agricultural district of two million acres of the most fertile land the sun had ever shone

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upon. He termed the new town of Waterville the "City of Destiny," and said the price of property would quadruple in a few years' time.

Fred was at once interested. "Here," he said to himself, "is a genuine town boomer, and as the fellow is stopping at this hotel it will be an easy matter to learn just how this boom business is operated. Any one can call a pill a pill, even the half-witted can do that, but it requires an artist of no mean ability to put a coating thick enough, or sweet enough, on a boom town pill to get me to swallow it. Then, too, it will make an excellent article for the *Banner*."

Accordingly, about eleven o'clock that forenoon, he called to see the irrepressible town boomer, and hear what marvelous story he might have to tell about Waterville.

He was admitted into the reception room by a young gentleman who assured him that Mr. Winthrop would soon be at leisure, begged him to be seated, and called his attention to the numerous maps on the wall, some of which covered nearly an entire side of the room.

Winthrop's young assistant seemed to know his business, and at once commenced the preliminary skirmish of interesting Fred in the great Thief River Valley, and especially in town lots in Waterville; but as Fred did not evince any inclination to purchase, the young fellow endeavored to further

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impress him by exhibiting a copy of the morning papers containing the advertisement of the new town of Waterville.

Now and then he would tiptoe over to the door, where the great town boomer, Wilbur Winthrop, was holding a private conversation with a would-be purchaser. He would put his ear to the keyhole, listen for a moment and then come back and again tell Fred that Mr. Winthrop would soon be at leisure.

Presently the door opened, and a gentleman in miner's garb came out. Fred was immediately admitted.

As he entered the private room of Wilbur Winthrop, he involuntarily paused to study, if but for a second, the face of the man who had arrived in Butte City late the night before, and now had every one in the place agog over the prospects of a new town, that had just been laid out on paper, in the Thief River Valley.

Wilbur Winthrop, with all the easy grace of a Chesterfield, motioned his visitor to a seat, and pushing a box of very superior Havanas towards him, invited him to join in burning a weed.

Winthrop was a man above average height, inclined to be slender, and with a rather good-looking face, beaming with apparent frankness, expressive dark eyes, a broad, intellectual forehead, and a

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square chin, indicating great determination of character. To this, add a luxuriant head of dark hair, and the reader will have an idea of his personal appearance.

He was evidently an adept in the art of reading human nature, and knew his man on sight; had seen much of Western life—and yet it required no second interview to discover in him the polished manners and grace of one who was on excellent terms with cultured elegance.

Fred accepted the proffered cigar, and they began discussing the great output of ore from the mines of Butte City, and the wonderful development of the Western country during recent years; the magnificent mining properties that had been opened, and, in fact, nearly everything except Waterville and the Thief River Valley.

Wilbur Winthrop, with the skill of a tactician, narrated incidents and legends of different miners who had devoted a lifetime in searching for the precious metal, and had finally “struck it rich” in some unexpected, out-of-the-way place.

Fred finally inquired in regard to the new town of Waterville, and was not a little surprised at the conservative reply he received, wholly devoid of any enthusiasm.

“Oh,” said Winthrop, “we have a very excellent agricultural country in the valley. We are

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building our new town of Waterville at the rapids of the Thief River. It has, perhaps, the greatest water power of any inland city in the United States. Many believe a great metropolis will eventually be built at that point. We also have much capital invested in the construction of the irrigating canals, reclaiming the valley lands from their present arid condition, and converting them into productive farms."

He went on in a voice that was almost musical in its intonation, explaining in a modest way why many people believed in the future of the place.

Good breeding and plain faces may cause women to endure one another, but it is good sense and pleasant manners that really act as a freemasonry among men, and afterwards, in thinking over the interview with the town boomer, Fred was compelled to admit that he was one of the most interesting men with whom he had ever come in contact.

That afternoon he finished a letter to the *Banner*, but it contained no reference to Waterville.

As a result of his second interview with Mr. Winthrop, he accepted an invitation to visit the new town, located some two hundred miles to the south.

They arrived one morning in the gray dawn of early day and Fred was not particularly attracted by the general appearance and "lay" of the new town site. It appeared crude and unfinished and abounded

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with sage brush, lava rock and sand. The waters of the rapids, however, in their mad rush, as they went foaming down the narrows like race horses, impressed him with the belief that nothing had been overdrawn in regard to this great natural power that had been idling away its time through the centuries.

Wilbur Winthrop stood by his side on the rocky bank, but said nothing. Fred looked up and exclaimed, "What a wonderful amount of energy is going to waste here!"

"It will soon be harnessed, and this vast power utilized in many manufacturing enterprises," said Winthrop. "I do not feel that I am overestimating the truth, Mr. Rockwell, in saying, here is power enough to turn every spindle in every woolen mill and factory in the United States."

"My only surprise is," replied Fred, "that these waters have not been put to use long before this. However, a man can easily starve on top of a mountain of gold, if there are no means of marketing the discovery. It requires ammunition to bring down game. Of course, we are all imitators and know full well if sufficient capital were employed to bring about certain conditions, then certain results would obviously follow." Fred was thinking of sugar-coated pills; Winthrop made no reply.

That night at the boarding house sort of hotel, Fred felt that he was truly roughing it. He arose

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early the next morning unrefreshed, and sat down to a very unpalatable breakfast, after which he started with Wilbur Winthrop on a drive through the valley.

Farmers were busy harvesting their grain, and upon inquiry he learned the yield of wheat was from forty to seventy bushels to the acre, and that oats yielded from sixty to one hundred bushels to the acre.

Fred was greatly surprised, and became almost enthusiastic over the agricultural possibilities of the valley.

"Why," said he, "there is no question, Mr. Winthrop, but that this is destined to be one of the richest agricultural valleys in the world. In my work on the *Banner*, I have had occasion to look up statistics on grain products, and if these farmers are telling the truth in regard to the yield of their crops, there is no other place like it in the United States."

A moment afterwards he was chagrined to think he had given way to such a burst of enthusiasm. It perhaps would have been better to have remained silent, and allowed Winthrop to enthuse over the country. Winthrop, however, took no advantage of Fred's outburst.

The day was perfect. The sun was shining and yet a cool, invigorating breeze swept gently down

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from the snowcapped Tetons. Driving rapidly along, they at last found themselves near the foothills on a slight elevation overlooking the valley to the West. Alighting from the carriage, Fred followed Winthrop's lead, and soon they found themselves on a table rock, at a sufficient elevation to see many miles to the North, South and West.

For a moment Fred contemplated the view in silence, and then turning to Winthrop, he said, "I have seen many beautiful sights, the Green and White mountains of New England, the Cumberlands of Virginia, and the mighty Rockies, through Colorado, but standing here on these foothills, with the mountains rising behind us to the bending sky, with their hoary crests, even on this July day, capped with snow, and these streams and foaming cataracts all shimmering in the sunshine, making sweet and restful music in their ceaseless flow—all this surpasses, I must admit, anything I have ever seen before.

"The valley itself is a picture of a vast green sward stretching away before us like a scroll. The yellow shocks of golden grain in these farming districts are suggestive of what may be in far larger measure in the years to come. No man can look upon such a promising prospect and not be convinced of the commercial importance which must attend the development of this valley."

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During Fred's generous words of enthusiasm, Wilbur Winthrop was silent, merely acquiescing in a quiet way to all Fred expressed.

Returning to Waterville they partook of a sumptuous repast, which Winthrop had ordered especially prepared, consisting principally of mountain trout caught that morning in Thief River.

After luncheon Fred accepted an invitation to smoke a cigar and walk with Winthrop over the town site.

"This," said Wilbur, "is block fourteen in Eagle's addition. You see it is less than three squares from the center of the town. It is one of the choicest locations we have. If you want me to give you some advice, Mr. Rockwell, I will do so, and say, buy a few of these lots. The price is only one hundred dollars each, and in my judgment they will be worth five hundred before five years from to-day."

Fred looked away in the distance at the farm lands, and heard the music of the sickles borne lazily to him on a half sleeping breeze; then he turned his gaze toward the river where the roaring waters were rushing down the rapids, proclaiming in thundering tones that Waterville was an exception to the rule.

He remembered one of his associates on the *Banner* admonishing him to be bold and daring,

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and after a short silence, turned to Winthrop and said: "I have been advised to keep clear of these new towns. The person who gave me this advice said there were a few honorable exceptions to the rule. I must believe from what I have seen that Waterville is an exception. This is one of the ventures and adventures of life, and I will take twenty-five of these lots. You may fix up the deed and certificate of title as soon as possible."

The deed and abstract were delivered to Fred that evening, and his check for twenty-five hundred dollars duly deposited in Wilbur Winthrop's pocket.

"It may be foolish," said Fred, "to act so hastily in this matter. However, I presume we have to make a beginning before we find out whether we have made a mistake or a million."

Winthrop turned to him and placing a hand on either shoulder, looked squarely in his eyes, as he said: "Any man may deceive another once. An adversary might say that beneath the surface I am a knave. Time alone will tell you as to this; but I have not sold you either a bunch of knavery or honesty; I have sold you some Waterville town lots, and my belief is, Mr. Rockwell, that you have invested wisely.

"If you keep these lots for a time—say five years or such a matter, you will thank me for suggesting the advisability of making the purchase. I

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have but one request to make—that you will wait a few years before passing judgment upon my advice.”

“Your request is cheerfully granted,” replied Fred with earnestness. They clasped hands and a bond of friendship was created between these two—a silken girdle that held their hearts together in after years.

“You are a strong character,” said Fred, “and I am glad to know you.”

“I should not be weak,” replied Winthrop, “although I fear at times I am. In me you see the product of hard work and fiercest frontier struggle. My life has not been a bed of ease. However, the rose-tinted hour invariably comes sooner or later to the man of patience and persistent action, and I am not insensible to the present opportunity.”

CHAPTER VII

DICK BALLARD IS INTRODUCED

MANY a Western town is provided with a public square, and the business houses and shops are arranged along the four sides of it in sentinel-like positions, the corner lots, where the most substantial buildings are usually erected, going at a premium. Waterville could not boast of a public square, but it had an iron bridge, and also an old wooden one, spanning the Thief River. A stone grist-mill had been built on the side of the river opposite the town, and on the elevated ground above, it was said, the State agricultural college would be built.

It was a favorite pastime of the real estate agents to sit on the station platform, and while waiting for the incoming trains, whittle pine sticks into shavings, telling of the different manufactories, State institutions, colleges and other public buildings that would be located at Waterville in the near future.

That evening after Fred had made his purchase of town lots he strolled away by himself across the iron bridge. Had he acted wisely? Would Waterville, after all, prove a "Boom town," and his in-

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vestment a losing one? Was Wilbur Winthrop, with his suave manners and great earnestness, which at times seemed to carry conviction to the hearts of all who heard him, the noble specimen of manhood he appeared, or was his fascination merely the art of the skilled Western town boomer? Would the managing editor, if he knew of it, approve his action in purchasing lots in such a new and undeveloped place as Waterville?

It is a common experience with mankind that after a perplexing transaction has been consummated we can deliberate with far more intentness than while negotiations were pending.

A peculiarity of Western towns is the plentifulness of real estate agents, who seem to travel in swarms, and like so many vampires feed on the credulity of that peculiar class of wise investors who are always trying to get something at a bargain-counter figure, usually resulting, however, in their paying an exorbitant price. After a reaction sets in and hard times overtake them, this migratory assortment of land agents generally pick up their "ink-horns" and fly as if from a pestilence. When a trade is made with a tenderfoot, however, every one in the village knows of it within a few hours.

As Fred was returning from his walk he was met on the outskirts of the village by a number of hangers-on who make their living selling town lots

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on commission. Each one was desirous of saying "just a word" to Fred in private.

The story of one was practically the story of all. They advised him to stop and think what he was losing by not buying more property in Waterville. One particularly long, lanky individual, a rough and ready frontier character, possessing all the "ear marks" of having recently gone to seed, and who wore a sombrero and high-topped boots, assured him that an "opportunity of a lifetime was at that very moment knocking at his door, and might never come again."

"If you will re-visit Waterville in a few months' time," he said, "you'll find the town lots I can sell you today for a mere song, goin' at ten times the price you can buy them for now.

"My name is Gideon Gibbons and I presume I am doin' the biggest real estate business in Waterville. I sell more lots than any other half dozen agents in this 'ere town. You've made a mistake, Mr. Rockwell, in buyin' of the Town Company. Of course, this is confidential, but if you'd come to me, 'stead of buyin' of Winthrop, I'd saved you big money. I know thar's an old sayin' that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, but, great Scott! can't you see Winthrop's got the birds, an' you've got the bushes—the sage bushes, an' a mighty lot of them, on your twenty-five lots? I 'spect the Com-

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pany's rejoicin' this very minute over the big sale they've made you."

"What do you mean by the 'Company'?" asked Fred.

"Why, you see, the Waterville Town Company owns mighty near all the property in this town. That man Winthrop is a member of the Company. Now, while I haven't as many lots for sale as the Town Company, my prices beat theirs all holler."

"Do you think," asked Fred, "that Mr. Winthrop charged me too much for my lots?"

"Think!" said Gibbons, "Think? Why, pardner, all the agents in town are laughin' about it; he took you in, that's all."

Fred bit his lips and mentally decided to investigate thoroughly before leaving Waterville.

"You see," said Gibbons, "all of us fellers are down on the Town Company. We don't like corporations, nohow; they don't give us honorable intentioned fellers a fair chance. We are the men that's buildin' up this 'ere town—givin' it the bone, an' the sinew, an' the standin', so to speak. Don't you see?"

"Yes," said Fred, "yes, I understand." And begging to be excused, he turned and walked hurriedly away from the "honorable intentioned" Gideon Gibbons, nor did he halt until he reached the privacy of his room in the Ballard House.

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Dick Ballard was a Grand Army man, and kept the least bad of all the bad hotels in Waterville. His habit of talking without moving his lower lip, and the familiar gesture of lifting his left hand to his chin to protect the cracked member, as if fearing it would receive an additional hurt, seemed almost a part of him, if not an important part of his personality. His lip, while undergoing repairs of healing, was an excuse, at times, for his not answering nagging Mrs. Ballard. He would merely lift his hand protectingly to his mouth, scowl terribly, and shake his head as if in excruciating pain.

Mrs. Dick Ballard, however, was not easily put off or subdued—she had a vixen way all her own, a tongue sharper than a two-edged sword, was relentlessly incorrigible, and a shrew in all that the term implies. She had a habit of following Dick to the front door of the hotel when he started down town without giving a good and sufficient reason for his going, and calling to him like a braying burro until he was a block away, attracting the attention of various shopkeepers and people on the street. At first this was very amusing, but later, whenever a loud, sonorous and lusty shouting was heard, as if some one were in mortal agony, those within ear shot would hastily look up to see whether it was Mrs. Ballard yelling at Dick, or a band of cowboys

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shooting up the town—the latter would provoke interest, the former only a smile.

One of Dick's favorite haunts was the brewery built on the bank of the Thief River at the lower edge of Waterville. It was said that he labored for over two years persuading a member of the brewery to join his state militia company, and when he finally succeeded, Dick would immediately commission him to a subordinate office, that he might have an excuse for often going to the brewery, ostensibly to consult with his brother officer, but in reality that he might gratify his insatiable thirst for beer.

The waves of civilization were rapidly flowing towards this young, embryonic city, but the white-capped breakers were not yet riding high enough on the incoming tide of humanity to warrant a really first-class hotel. The only thing first-class about the Ballard House was the price paid for lodging and meals. After the average traveler settled his bill at the Ballard House, there was generally a half distinct impression in his mind that he had been stopping at a first-class hotel; but the remembrance of three kinds of meat cooked in the same kettle at the same time was not easily forgotten.

A man sometimes in taking an inventory of himself and his mistakes falls into a mental speculation of wonderment and surprise that any one rational and in possession of all his faculties can entertain

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any special respect for his own so-called business qualifications. Fred was in his room, and in this mood when there came a gentle knocking at his door. He quickly admitted his visitor, and found it was Dick Ballard, the proprietor.

"I reckon," said he, as soon as he stepped in and carefully closed the door, "you'll be one of us by and by. Bought property already, and a mighty good purchase it was, too. Oh, you know a good thing when you see it, you bet your life you do."

"Do you believe," said Fred, after recovering from his surprise, "that the lots I purchased were reasonable in price?"

"I should say so, sir; mighty cheap. This 'ere town is comin' out of the kinks in fine shape. We'll have a drum corps in our state militia company before another year, you bet we will. I presume you know we have the finest drilled company at Waterville, outside of the regular army, in the State?"

"I have been told," said Fred, "that I paid too much for the property I purchased. I am more interested in learning the truth or falsity of this statement than I am about your militia company."

"Who told you that?" asked Ballard, with indignation. As Fred did not answer, the hotel proprietor went on to say, "I'll bet it was J. Arthur Boast. You want to let that Boast chap alone. He is so low down the Indians on the reservation won't

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have anything to do with him, and the red skins are so triflin' that I won't let 'em sleep on the porch of this 'ere hotel. Far be it from me, however, to speak bad of anyone; but remember, Mr. Rockwell, and put it down in your pipe and smoke it, that you can't believe everything these fellers 'round here tells you."

The truth of this remark impressed itself on Fred so forcibly, and his indignation getting the better of him, he turned quickly upon Dick Ballard, and said bitterly, "Who in blank can I believe?"

"You may believe me, sir," rejoined Ballard, with the bristling quickness of a return blow, "and I'll produce *prima facie* evidence of everything I say. This town's all right; your investment is a good one, and the man who says it is not is most criminally interferin' with other people's business—but, say, hold on a minute," said Ballard, as if he had forgotten something, "will you take a drink?" and he produced a bottle from his pocket.

"No, I thank you," said Fred.

"Well, if you don't mind, I will," said the landlord, as he proceeded to treat himself to a liberal portion from the contents of the bottle.

"The fact is," he went on to say, in a half whisper, "Mrs. Ballard keeps a devilish close watch on me, and it's really an accommodation, pardner, to find even standin' room where I can take a 'nip' at

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my bottle, and not feel that her catlike eyes are on me. Oh, she's a terror, she is, from strictly a white-ribbon standpoint. When she scolds, you think it is a cyclone; when she attempts to speak gently, which is dagnation seldom, I can tell you, then you are reminded of an ordinary fog-horn."

"Almost everything," said Fred, smiling, "depends upon one's point of view."

Ballard failed to catch the irony of the remark, and as he sat down, smacking his lips at the remembrance of the drink he had had, and carefully putting one hand up to his cracked lip, said, with emphasis, "everything I tell you is *prima facie*. I know how it is. Some of these fellers have been tryin' to make you dissatisfied with your purchase. I am not selling town lots. My business is to run this 'ere hotel, and see that everybody has a fair deal, and pays first-class prices."

"Who is the Town Company?" asked Fred.

"The Town Company, sir, consists of some of the most remarkable men in this country. They are strong men, brainy men; they are hustlers and builders of communities, and I," said Ballard, rising to his feet, "I am their friend."

"This man, Wilbur Winthrop," he went on, "carries more gray matter about in his brain than all the shark real estate agents in Waterville put together. He's one of the Company, but you'll meet

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them all before long and agree in sayin' that they are the cleanest lot of men you ever met. Winthrop is a great man, but there are others in the company that are a mighty sight stronger than he. They are all men of honor, and their integrity is *prima facie*."

"*Prima facie*" was a favorite expression with Dick Ballard. After he had delivered himself of the strongest language at his command, he treated himself to another drink and retired.

Fred sat far into the night looking out of his window into the mellow moonlight, listening to the ceaseless roar of the waters, and the yelping coyotes in the distance, which were answered by half a dozen dogs of the town. At times he regretted his purchase, and again he felt it must, in the very nature of things, increase in value many times in a few years.

The moon lit up the eastern sky, and seemed to hang in space like a ball of fire, beckoning him to return to his Eastern home before disaster overtook him. The three great Tetons of the mountain range bearing their name stood out in bold relief, throwing long and menacing shadows directly towards him. The shimmering of the soft moonbeams glistened on the restless and foaming waters of the thundering river, whose alluring song of promise and power ladened the night wind. There was a smell of pines, of sand, and a sense of vastness in

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the air. The golden tinge of the western sky, so noticeable earlier in the evening, had changed to deepest lilac, and as the night advanced the purple tint grew deeper and blended with the dark blue of the canopied heavens, bristling with diamond stars of wondrous brilliancy.

As he made ready for the night, he thought, while disrobing, of a story he once heard of a man who unexpectedly went to hell backwards, while his face was honestly turned towards heaven, and he wondered why he had never consulted Burke's Heraldry to see if he were not related to him.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE MINE

SOON after Fred had taken his seat at the breakfast table the next morning, he was joined by an individual small in stature, but tastefully dressed. His eyes were restless, but he seemed several times on the point of making an observation before he finally mustered up courage to do so.

"Very pleasant morning," he observed, looking at Fred and then hastily glancing across the room.

The soft, sweet breath of a summer morning, stimulating the mind to better deeds and life to higher aims, came in with the sunshine at the open window.

"Yes, delightful," was Fred's reply.

"Sunny days are the rule, cloudy ones the exception at Waterville. At least, that's my experience during a year's sojourn among the good people at the village."

There was a quaking sound in the fellow's voice, a sort of crack and squeak, that attracted Fred's attention. He wondered if this chap were also in the real estate business. It seemed as if everyone he met was a real estate agent, and he was on the point

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of asking him, when, looking up from his plate, the stranger said: "Real estate is my line. My office is just across the street. You can see the sign from here."

Looking out of the window, Fred saw a large real estate sign, with gold letters on a black background, bearing the name "J. Arthur Boast."

"Oh, you are Mr. Boast?" asked Fred, turning from the window.

"J. Arthur Boast, at your service."

Half an hour later Fred Rockwell was seated in the real estate office of J. Arthur Boast, looking over his special bargain list, not with a view to buying, but rather to gain information. Boast talked a good deal, but in his fawning, insinuating manner, advised Fred, without saying it in so many words, to keep his eye open when dealing with the Town Company.

After Fred had carefully scanned the list of lots, he was better satisfied with his purchase.

Taking a bottle from his desk, Boast held it up towards the sunlight, and asked Fred if he would have some "red liquor." When Fred had declined, with thanks, Boast walked back and forth with the bottle in his hand, and in a falsetto voice, meant to be confidential, confessed to Fred that he was a slave to the habit, and must quit drinking; that red liquor was getting an awful hold on him. He acted as if

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desirous of giving the impression that he was a hard drinker. He finally poured out some of the contents of the bottle into a glass and drank it down at one swallow, which proceeding had a decidedly painful effect on him, for his eyes filled with tears, and a sort of wretched do-or-die expression added an element of misery to the weakness of his face.

Fred concluded, notwithstanding all he had said against himself, that J. Arthur Boast was not a drinking man.

"That liquor is all right," said Boast, "a very superior article, but it is a little early in the day for me to commence. It always half strangles me in the morning."

As Fred was seeking information from which to draw his conclusions, he gave Boast all the opportunity possible to express himself in regard to Waterville and its people. The fellow said nothing positive, yet there was an evil vein of insinuation in all that he did say, not only in regard to the Waterville Town Company, and every other real estate agent, but also against everyone generally. There is an assassin who carries a dirk crimson with the blood of his fellows, but the coward who sinks his stiletto of evil insinuations into one's character and stabs with the poisoned blade of innuendo, is entitled to even less commiseration than is the spiller of blood.

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Fred very much disliked Boast, and afterwards learned that he was universally unpopular and shunned by every one in Waterville.

Instead of returning to Butte City with Winthrop that afternoon, Fred remained in Waterville and arranged to take the early stage the next morning to Gold Valley, which was located some sixty miles northwest of Waterville, in the Fish River mining district.

After a novel and rather exciting stage ride he arrived in that Idaho mining town late the following night, registered at the Bluff House, and after a late supper retired to his room for a much needed rest.

The next morning he found, upon inquiry, that Ben Hilliard's mine was located about half a mile from town, far up the mountain, and he at once started in that direction, to see how the work on the shaft was progressing towards the three-hundred-foot level.

The town of Gold Valley was nestled in a little depression with abrupt mountains towering away to the sky on either side of it. The mountains were covered with spruce and pine and mountain poplars up to the very timber line, above which the barren rocks rose majestically into lofty regions of almost perpetual snow.

Meandering its way through the town was a mountain stream abounding with trout, on one side

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of which were stores and shops, and on the other residences. Fred noticed that some of the buildings were of modern architecture, and neatly painted, while others were primitive in the extreme—relics of early mining days—which, together with the profusion of shade trees, increased the rather quaint and picturesque effect of the little village.

“Good morning,” said Fred, as he approached Hilliard, who in miner’s garb was working vigorously away at the frame of the shaft over the Shonbar. The old man looked up with an indifferent air and said:

“Good mawnin’, suh,” then recognizing his visitor, he threw down his hammer and gave Fred’s hand such a squeeze in his powerful grasp that it was numb for hours after.

“Why, suh,” cried the old miner. “I am almost paralyzed to see you. I am indeed, suh. Mr. Rockwell, I welcome you, suh, to Gold Valley, and to the Shonbar. Here, suh, are our possessions,” waving his hand towards the shaft.

“Immediately upon my return from the city, Mr. Rockwell, we commenced work in earnest, suh, and before many weeks, I am proud to say, suh, we will reach the three-hundred-foot level and be ready to cross-cut into the vein. You don’t know,” he said, again taking Fred’s hand, “how proud I am, suh—yes, proud to be honored with a visit from you.

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Most men remember small obligations, but forget big ones, but I don't, and I very much desire that you personally inspect the mine, and there's no better time than the present."

Fred was eager to see the workings, and went down in the bucket to where the miners were drilling in the rock. The old gentleman kept him there until he had explained everything to the minutest detail, and when Fred at last reached the surface he felt that he had now quite an idea of sinking shafts.

"Come," said the old gentleman, "my Ruth will be delighted to see you again, suh; she will, indeed."

Then turning, he gave some instructions to the foreman, saying he would not return that afternoon, and together they walked down the mountain to the village of Gold Valley.

The Hilliard residence was a modest one, situated well back from the street near some huge boulders—a natural pyramid of rocks—while a beautiful little spring of water flowed near its base. In front there was a very pretty lawn filled with growing evergreens and mountain ash.

"I planted these trees myself, suh," said Mr. Hilliard, "years ago. They remind me of my old home in Virginia. I was the first one to set out shade trees in Gold Valley, suh; the first one."

As Fred entered the gate he paused a moment to contemplate the beauty and homelike appearance of

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the lawn, and Mr. Hilliard's house, with its wide porches literally covered with honeysuckles and ivy. It fairly radiated with comfort.

Fred found Ruth Hilliard dressed as a mountain maid, instead of the fashionable young lady who had called on him in his New York home. But one point of similarity existed. In the belt of her simple little gown was thrust a bunch of violets. Not so large, perhaps, as had adorned the more elaborate one she had worn in New York, but Fred thought it even more sweet and becoming.

She noticed, after the first greeting, that he was looking at her violets. "Oh," she said, "we cannot grow these little beauties here, but a friend of ours, knowing of my fondness for violets, sent us a box from Salt Lake City. Was he not kind?" And Fred wondered who the donor could be, and regretted that he himself had not brought her some flowers.

Ruth Hilliard was not such a woman as poets rave about, and yet there was a grace, a charm, about her that commanded admiration. Her hair in the sunlight was like a beautiful sheen of gold with little ringlets here and there, her complexion was pink and white, save when under deep excitement, and then a ruddy glow would redden her cheeks.

As Fred talked to her that afternoon he forgot the hair, forgot the delicately formed, rosy lips, for-

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got even the glow of pink that came and went over her face as he looked into her speaking eyes—eyes so clear, like pools of deepest blue, reflecting the promising fires of love's fulfillment; he even forgot the long lashes that fringed them with gentlest protection. Her eyes were the crowning feature of her expressive countenance, which may not have been beautiful in the parlance of fashion, yet it was one that a student would interpret as full of intelligence, and, after all, to the cultured, is there aught more charming?

It is easy for some women to be interesting, and it is easy for others to be good, but it seems to be the most difficult thing in the world for a woman to be continuously irresistible, but Ruth possessed this attractive quality.

Fred spent the afternoon with the Hilliards, on the wide veranda of their cozy dwelling, forgetting time in the enjoyment of the surrounding scenery and his companions. The sun went down behind the western mountains, leaving the beauty of an afterglow reflected on the hills and on the waters of the mountain brooklet. The moon climbed the eastern sky and threw its rays among the clinging vines that grew in profusion about the Hilliard home.

A feeling of peace and a contentment—possibly dangerous—stole into his heart. The unseen, potent

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force that sooner or later binds us with a silken cord, was thonging him to a future destiny—a destiny wherein God would make him a party to the most sacred covenant among the children of men.

When it is all said and done, the only real happiness the world affords men is the companionship of a sweet and noble woman, clever and sensible, a compromise, not a comedy, one who understands life and accepts it with the salute of a princess and the shrug of a philosopher.

CHAPTER I X

THE STAGE DRIVER

FROM Gold Valley Fred sent to the *Banner* one of his strongest descriptive letters. The inspiration of the new West, with its gorges, mountains, smell of pines, beautiful valleys, and purling streams abounding with speckled beauties, tinged every sentence. His vivacious style, which had in the beginning won for him a place on the *Banner*, was reinforced by a new and intoxicating picturesqueness of the scenes which stood out in bold relief around him. For two weeks he did little else but tramp through the valleys, following up mountain streams on fishing jaunts, often resting at the foot of Deer Lick Falls, and feeling that he was "roughing it" in the most delightful fashion.

One night, coming in after a long tramp far up in the mountains, he found awaiting him a bundle of mail that had been forwarded from Butte City. Among his letters was one from his chief, which read as follows:

Banner Office,
New York City, July 18th.

Dear Sir:—

Your letters to the *Banner*, in one sense of the

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word, are all, and even more than I expected. They are giving excellent satisfaction. As yet, however, you have expressed no decided opinion in regard to the desirability, or rather the undesirability, of Western investments.

My idea is to educate our readers against unstable investments. Nine out of ten of the mining shafts in Montana, in my judgment, have had more money put into them than ever has or ever will be taken out. You will also find many Western towns where they are selling lots at from one to two hundred dollars each, which, in reality, would be expensive property to own at the government price of \$1.25 per acre. Of course, there are, perhaps, a few honorable exceptions.

Respectfully,

J. R. S. Chief.

To Fred Rockwell, Esq.

When one is seeking an excuse for his convictions, especially when the red blood of youth is ripe with decision, and one's convictions are as strong as Fred's had become in regard to Butte City and Waterville, such a little sentence as, "Of course, there are, perhaps, a few honorable exceptions," saves one a great deal of worry.

Duty and Desire may have been twin brothers, but that was long ago, while today, at best, they are not considered as being more nearly related than thirty-second cousins, and both usually deny any relationship whatever.

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However, Fred was too light-hearted to be cast down by the half criticism of the correspondence he was sending to the *Banner*.

He had an engagement that evening with Ruth Hilliard and her father; indeed, his was a standing invitation at the Hilliard home, and almost every afternoon since his arrival at Gold Valley found him there.

As he started from the hotel he was accosted by a familiar voice shouting, "Hello, pard, how d'ye do?" and Gideon Gibbons thrust out his long arm and freckled hand to salute Fred in true Western fashion. He still wore his sombrero and regulation high-topped boots.

Fred assured 'Gibbons he was delighted to see him, which in a way was a truth inverted. "I knew you would be," said Gibbons. "You see, I've given up the real estate business down at Waterville and have turned stage-driver. Of course, every man in this 'ere country is lookin' for promotion. The worst I'm tryin' to find is the best of it. Men are sort of like lambs in an open pasture; they browse on that part of the range where the grass is sweetest, where the sun shines warmest, and where they don't git the worst of things. I don't reckon I'm any smarter than other people; nevertheless, I've had my eye on this 'ere job for several months, but

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you bet your tarpaulin, them other real estate agents didn't know nothin' about it.

"I tell you, pardner, it's a mighty elevatin' position to drive a six-horse team through these 'ere deep mountain gorges, in all kinds of wind and weather. Had to give a mighty stout bond, too, for we handle all the express matter and thar's a heap of gold dust hauled down from this 'ere camp."

Fred was glad in a way to meet any man whom he had seen before, however slight the acquaintance may have been, although he was just now quite eager to hurry on to the Hilliards'. In the course of their conversation Gideon Gibbons confessed to him that in their former talk he was "givin' it to him jes' a leetle" in regard to the lots Fred purchased from the Town Company.

"You see," he said, "the facts are, the Town Company of Waterville has made that air town, and are still makin' it. It's a mighty peert place, and it's growin' peerter all the time."

Fred wondered whether all the "honorable intentioned" fellows of Waterville would talk in the same way about the Town Company, if they were occupying positions where their interests were no longer adverse to it.

"Then you don't believe I paid too much for my lots?" he asked, looking up with a quizzical expression.

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"No," said Gibbons, "them lots are all right, pardner, you can bet a new whiplash on that, and will make you a barrel if you hold on to 'em. They sold 'em to you dirt cheap. That was jes' a leetle competition talk I was givin' you that night down at Waterville. No one means much what they say, do they? Out here, you know, these 'ere things we say are like poker-chips; the more you have, the more you rake in durin' the game. Business is business, you know, and it's no use prayin' fur a buyer, unless you hustle fur him at the same time. Heaven, I've noticed, has a way of answerin' prayers to the feller who helps himself by hustlin'. I tell you, when you're sellin' town lots a man has to talk fur his own interests."

"I've throwed up the hull blanked business of sellin' lots since I was promoted. Old Dick Ballard," he continued, "is jes' as *prima facie* as ever, and his lip—well, it's liable to bleed almost any time, if you catch him off his guard and git him to laughin', and he still says his company is the finest drilled militia in the State. By the way, the Town Company has had a meetin' and the people are feelin' mighty good jes' now."

"How's that?" asked Fred.

"Oh," replied Gibbons, "about once a month the Town Company has a meetin', pass resolutions, declar' dividends, kind of a general jubilee—a red-

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fire affair, you know, get up a new prospectus of the different manufacturin' enterprises that's goin' to be built thar'; also of colleges and State institutions that will be located at Waterville this 'ere comin' year, and that always makes the people feel high-spirited fur the followin' ten days or two weeks. Most of the town goes on a booze fightin' spree after one of them thar' encouragin' meetin's."

"I presume," said Fred, "that Wilbur Winthrop is one of the leading spirits of the Company?"

"He is one of the Company," said Gibbons, as he filled and lit his pipe, "but he lacks a good deal, I can tell you, of bein' the biggest toad in the puddle. It ain't the man who makes the biggest fuss, always, that gits the most done."

"Now, thar's the old Colonel Alexander, he's the feller who lays out the plans on a gigantic scale; he's the man behind the talk. Then thar's General Ira House, I 'spect he has the biggest reputation of any town builder on the western half of the continent—I 'low as what he has. He is a funny feller, is General Ira House, as well as a mighty big man. He never carries a satchel with him, but he buys a clean shirt in every town he visits."

"And when you're talkin' about smart ones, you don't want to forgit Mr. John Pilcher. He's the corporation attorney, and you can bet your last half-dollar the Company will never run agin any shoals

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as long as he stands at the wheel and writes up contracts. Oh, he's a hummer, and no mistake.

"It's reported down thar' that half a dozen different railroad companies are tryin' mighty hard to git him for their attorney, but he says, 'Not much, I've cast my fortune with my friends and with Waterville, and I'll stick by the enterprise, as long as a town lot can be sold.'

"The Town Company is mighty cute," he went on. "They never have any lawsuits, 'cause their contracts are drawn up with 'hackamore' knots tied knee deep all over a feller they're dealin' with."

It is probable that the loquacious Gibbons would have gone on indefinitely, had not Fred begged to be excused, pleading a previous engagement. "All right, good night, pardner," said Gibbons, as he started for the stables to look after his horses, while Fred walked briskly along the street towards the Hilliard home.

Ruth had just accepted his invitation to go on a fishing jaunt some afternoon to a place called Silver Point Lake, about two miles away. Her simplicity of manner was like a "crystal mirror of the life around," while clinging to her frankness in all things was a demureness, a half smothered humor that charmed and fascinated Fred, and he found himself constantly comparing her to a violet.

They were standing on the porch of the Hilliard

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home in the soft, summer twilight, while a mountain breeze was tossing about the ringlets of Ruth's fluffy hair—coquetting with them. Fred was studying her face. She was looking far away towards the West, where the sun had left a crimson glow. Presently they heard a voice calling.

"Ruth, Ruth, where's your father?" and before Ruth could reply, a woman well advanced in years came out on the porch and, seeing Fred, eyed him critically.

"Aunt Phoebe," said Ruth, "this is Mr. Rockwell, daddy's friend. Mr. Rockwell, this is my Aunt Phoebe."

Aunt Phoebe acknowledged the introduction with a stately bow.

"I'm very glad to see you, suh," she said, addressing Fred. "I understand you are interested with my brother in the mine. I can give you, Mr. Rockwell, some very excellent advice; I can, indeed, suh, but I will defer it until some other time." Then turning to Ruth, she said: "Do you know where your father is?" There was a sad gentleness about her and in her voice.

"I do not," said Ruth, sweetly; "I think he will be here in a few minutes."

"I presume he's grub stakin' some of these prospectin' miners again," cried Aunt Phoebe. "Mr. Rockwell," she continued, "I have to watch over my

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brother very closely; I do, indeed, suh. A man with a single ambition is not so bad, *if* the ambition is a rational one, but if it's a moonbeam he is playin' with, the sooner the delusion is over, the better for himself and his family. He's been plantin' money all over these mountains for many years, but there's no crop ever been harvested. Few people profit by a woman's advice because they refuse to be convinced, but there's always a multitude cheerfully tellin' afterwards of what might have been. 'Truth waits long, but it whips hard,' and I shall certainly speak very plainly when he comes." Saying this, she turned and went into the house.

Ruth was evidently confused, and regretted her aunt's words, while Fred was at loss to understand the full import of the spinster's remarks.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Rockwell," said Ruth, "that Aunt Phoebe should so far forget herself as to speak as she has before a stranger."

Fred declared there was no reason for being disturbed, but Ruth was not wholly reassured by his words. "I know daddy will be very angry with Aunt Phoebe."

"There is surely no cause for that," said Fred.

"You see," said Ruth, "mamma died when Virginia and I were little girls, and Aunt Phoebe has been a mother to us. Ever since daddy commenced work on the Shonbar she has stubbornly opposed

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him. She says he will never find a dollar's worth of gold, if he sinks the shaft a thousand feet. I sometimes think she has influenced sister Virgie. Sister is away from home now teaching school in Waterville.

"I do not know whether daddy is wrong or not," Ruth went on, "but if he is, then I am, too, because I believe with all my heart that he will find the wealth for which he has so persistently labored. I sincerely hope," she continued, laying a hand on Fred's arm, and looking pleadingly up into his face, "that you will not be influenced by anything Aunt Phoebe may have said, will you?"

Fred was very human, with the red blood of life beating in the crucible of his heart, and he could not withstand such an appeal. If doubts had ever come to him, the girl at his side, by her looks and words, had put them to flight.

"No," he replied, "my faith is as firm as the rocks in your father's mine." He looked into her eyes as he said this, and caught a glimpse of a woman's soul reflected through tears of gratitude.

CHAPTER X

PROPERTY HAS GONE UP

THE following morning Fred received a call from Mr. Hilliard. The old miner's face wore a troubled expression.

"Mr. Rockwell," said he, raising himself to his full height, and with the dignity of a general, addressing Fred, "I assure you, suh, I am greatly pained at the uncalled for remarks which my sister made in your presence last evenin'; I am, indeed, suh."

"Really, Mr. Hilliard," replied Fred, "there is no occasion to refer to the matter at all. I told your daughter, and now tell you, that I have every confidence in the mine, and that confidence will continue until your faith is shaken. I cannot say any more, and, under the circumstances, can say no less."

"Mr. Rockwell," replied the old miner, "you, suh, are a very honorable gentleman, and I'm very proud of my partnership with you; I am, indeed, suh."

"In regard to my sister—why, she is a jewel, suh; a jewel without price. Perhaps, suh, you may have noticed that there are people whose presence

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adds luster to the sunshine, brilliancy to the stars, and gives rest to the weary, because of their gentleness of heart—such a character, suh, is my sister, and I assure you, in her younger days she was one of the most remarkable women of Virginia; yes, suh, a very remarkable woman. She has been a true sister to me, suh, and a faithful mother to my daughters, but in some way she disbelieves in the Shonbar, and would you believe it, suh, she has gone so far at times as to intimate that I am as crazy as a March hare in regard to ever strikin' it rich in our minin' property? The more some things are talked over, the less they are seemingly understood, and I cannot persuade her to see the future certainty of our minin' property. Yes, suh, she certainly has said some very bitter things against the Shonbar, but for all that, she is a very remarkable woman even to this day. Yes, suh, quite remarkable.

“I have now a matter, Mr. Rockwell,” he continued, “of very great importance to discuss with you.” Fred offered the old gentleman a cigar, which he accepted, and soon they were discussing the “important matter,” which, of course, referred to the Shonbar.

“We are not far away, Mr. Rockwell, from the three-hundred-foot level. Our machinery and pumps, suh, have been workin' remarkably well. Two weeks more and our shaft will be finished. Then

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we will cross-cut, and my opinion is that it will be well for you to remain in Gold Valley, and be ready to send in your resignation as correspondent of that New York paper; yes, suh, that is my advice. It is only proper, suh, that you should enjoy the riches that await you."

"But, suppose, Mr. Hilliard," said Fred, "supposing you do not find any pay-ore when you cross-cut into the vein. In that event, I presume, you agree with me that it would be a pretty good idea for me to hold my position on the *Banner*?"

"Of course, suh," replied the old miner, "there is a possibility. However, I most certainly would advise that you prepare your resignation, but don't date it—you understand?" Fred smiled. "There is not one chance," continued the old miner, "in ten thousand that we won't strike it. Of course, I admit there is this one chance against us, suh, for the sake of argument alone. Mr. Grim is now takin' out of the Peacock mine some of the richest ore I ever saw in my life; sylvanite ore, suh; sylvanite ore, and his mine joins ours, suh, as you know, directly on the nawth."

Fred was silent for a moment, looking deep into space, and after whistling softly a bar from an old hymn, repeated slowly, "'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the

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face of the deep,' and his noblest work was man—a nervy man." Presently looking at Mr. Hilliard, half laughing and in a joking way, he said: "In the event, Mr. Hilliard, you do not strike it, what then? Will you be discouraged?"

"No, suh, the knowledge that one is right pulls out all the thorns of pain. Under such conditions disappointment and despair give way to certainty, and content, and I might go even further and tell you that if we fail at the three-hundred-foot level, suh, and you can furnish the money, we will start the next mornin' for the four-hundred-foot level, but I assure you, suh, I have no idea you'll have to furnish another dollar. The Shonbar is a sure winner; it is, indeed, suh. The oldest miners in the camp say if we stick to the Shonbar it will be worth more'n five years than Rufus Grim's Peacock mine.

"When I was your age, Mr. Rockwell," he continued, blowing a cloud of smoke out of the window towards the Shonbar, "I could not have stuck to that property year after year, as I have done. Why, suh, it took a quarter of a century's experience for me to learn that 'a rollin' stone gathers no moss'; it did, indeed, suh. Now, I have observed that fellows who strike it, in nine cases out of ten, are the ones who follow up and hold on after they once scent a trail. Why, suh, if you had seen the float rock that I found before stakin' out the Shonbar,

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you would know why I believe there is an entire hill full of wealth over yonder."

Gold is the world's rule of measure—it is the try-square of every yard-stick on earth; it speaks the language of all nations, it adjusts all balances of trade, and at the feast takes its place, as a matter of course, at the head of the table.

While they were talking there came a gentle tap at the door, and a boy stalked into the room with a letter in his hand, and asked for Mr. Hilliard.

"I'm Mr. Hilliard, at your service, suh," said the old miner, rising with much dignity. "Thank you," he said, taking the letter. The boy took himself off, while Mr. Hilliard, adjusting his glasses, read aloud the address, "Miss Ruth Hilliard." "Why, this is for my daughter!"

Removing his glasses, he placed the letter in his pocket and said: "Mr. Boast has evidently returned to Gold Valley."

"Mr. Boast?" said Fred, with a rising inflection.

"Yes, suh; Mr. Boast; a young man in whom I have only the slightest confidence. His full name is J. Arthur Boast. His father is Colonel Boast, who lives on a ranch about three miles from here."

Fred could not explain why, but the unfavorable opinion he had formed of J. Arthur Boast, while at

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Waterville, was, in the twinkling of an eye, changed to pronounced dislike.

Mr. Hilliard took his departure and Fred began preparing for the next day's fishing jaunt. His door had been left ajar, and a little later he heard, with a shiver, the squeaky, ill-omened voice that he so distinctly remembered.

"How do you do, Mr. Rockwell?"

As Fred turned and saw J. Arthur Boast standing at his door, he thought, here is one man whose meanness needs no label. "How do you do?" he replied, rather sharply.

"I did not expect to find you at Gold Valley," said Boast, in an insinuating tone.

"Why not?" asked Fred, without deigning to look up.

"Oh, you Eastern fellows, and newspaper men in particular, never stay long in one place. So you have met my old mining friend, Mr. Hilliard?"

"Yes," replied Fred.

"I presume you have met his daughter, Miss Ruth?" at the same time looking from the corners of his restless eyes in a manner that was intended to be cunning.

Fred was full of resentment and did not make an immediate reply. Boast continued:

"They are old friends of mine; a most respectable family. I used to live in Gold Valley; maybe

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I'll live here again. One can't say what may happen, you know."

"I thought you were in love with Waterville," rejoined Fred.

"One's love is where one's possessions are, don't you see?" replied Boast.

Fred made no reply, but busied himself with his fishing tackle. Boast took a bottle from his pocket, saying, "Will you have a drink of very old and respectable red liquor? Something especially brewed out of Tennessee mountain sunshine, good fellowship, pomegranates and Kentucky rosebuds."

Fred declined. "Well, I suppose," Boast went on, "I ought not to drink so much. The truth is, I am a pretty devilish hard citizen. I am drinking recklessly of this corn juice, but no one takes interest enough to tell me not to do so; yet I know I am going to the bad. The habit is formed, and while suppressing the beginning of a habit is mere child's play, yet a battalion of infantry and a mounted guard are insufficient to break it up after it is formed, so what is a fellow going to do about it?"

He waited some time for a reply, but as Fred made none, he proceeded to pour out a small portion of the contents of the bottle into a glass, then added some water to it, and stood looking out of the window.

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"Won't you be seated?" asked Fred, with rather tardy and forced hospitality.

"Thank you, I believe I will," replied Boast, as he sat down with the glass of liquor still in his hand. He acted as if he dreaded the ordeal of swallowing the potion, but he felt that it would not do to set it aside, after all he had said about being a hard drinker. Finally he gulped it down at a single swallow, and drank a great quantity of water immediately after. He strangled considerably and his eyes became very red. Poor chap, he seemed glad that the ordeal was over.

"Mr. Rockwell," he said, "there are things going to happen down at Waterville, within the next ninety days, that will surprise you. Some very large manufacturing enterprises will soon be located there."

"That is welcome news," replied Fred. "As a property owner in the new city, I am naturally interested in its development."

"Property has gone up ten per cent since you were there."

"Is that so?" asked Fred, in some surprise.

"Of course, I am selling my special bargain list at the same old prices, but the Company, and other real estate agents who have desk room here and there over the town, are trying hard to inflate prices. I am holding them level, however, and intend to keep

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on doing so. I do not propose having Waterville killed by a lot of town boomers who are trying to get prices away above intrinsic values."

"It is very fortunate that Waterville has such a conservative citizen as yourself," replied Fred. He looked at Boast critically, and was reminded of a sieve with a coarse screen; nothing more prominent than the skeleton wires were visible in his character through which manliness and manhood, trustworthiness and truth, righteousness and respect had all seemingly passed away.

"It is very complimentary of you to say so, I am sure," said Boast. "Of course, Mr. Rockwell, far be it from me to speak slightly of any one."

"Certainly not," replied Fred. "The man or woman who refuses to speak ill of others belongs to a limited, yet very charming class, and if justice is meted out to them, they will surely inherit most generously the good things of earth." Fred looked out of the window and Boast looked hard at him.

The trend of Boast's conversation was the expression of a petty, despicable character, decidedly wicked in its insinuations. One to hear him talk would believe, if credence were put in his words, that the destiny of the Thief River Valley rested entirely with him. He seemingly thought the whole of Waterville was an immense merry-go-round passing his office door at stated intervals, so he could

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keep a proper check upon the happenings of the place. He began again:

"The truth is, Waterville is in the dumps—it's a mighty sick town. What remedy would you suggest, Mr. Rockwell? A booming newspaper tonic?"

"I believe," replied Fred, "there is no disease, unless it is hypocrisy, for which Nature has not provided a remedy. Time will probably cure the apparent lethargy of Waterville."

Fred's mention of hypocrisy did not claim Boast's attention. He was thinking of other things.

"How do you like Miss Ruth?" he asked, in a high, squeaky voice.

"Miss Ruth?" repeated Fred, with a perplexed look on his face.

"Yes, Miss Ruth Hilliard; how do you like her? Pretty fair specimen for the West, isn't she?"

"Oh, Miss Hilliard," said Fred. "My likes and dislikes are hardly to be considered. One seldom forms an opinion until one is acquainted. I have known people for a very short time, and yet have taken an instinctive dislike to them, and later found they were only a little less bad than the devil.

"Miss Hilliard, however, has the appearance," continued Fred, "of a young lady of much sweetness and culture. She has most charming manners, but as my observation has been limited, I can hardly say more."

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Fred was preparing to leave the room, but Boast, again taking up the bottle, said, "You had better drink with me. I am liable to take every drop of this red liquor before I let up, and you would be doing me a kindness by dividing up a little."

"No, thank you," replied Fred.

"Very well," replied Boast, as he arose and walked towards the door. "I shall remain in Gold Valley several days and hope to see you often."

Fred closed the door after Boast had taken his leave, and muttered the one word, "Scoundrel," under his breath.

It is almost as pitiable a sight to see a man trying to appear less worthy than he really is, as it is to see a man trying to appear more worthy—at best, both are mere imitations of poor acting.

CHAPTER XI

OWNER OF THE PEACOCK MINE

THE next morning Fred was up at an early hour for a morning walk, and followed the winding road up the hillside towards the Shonbar. The air was fresh and invigorating; the sun was just rising above the eastern mountains, the robins and thrushes were gaily singing their morning songs, and he could not refrain from mentally comparing the stifling conditions that are so much a part of our overcrowded cities, with the healthful and exhilarating effect about him. The pine-laden air was a tonic to his nerves, while the perfume of bursting wild cherry buds filled the air, as well as life's prospect, with faith and hope.

A shadow drifted across his mind. It was J. Arthur Boast's inquiry in regard to Ruth Hilliard. "But why," he argued to himself, "should I be so ready to come to her rescue? What right have I to be her champion? Every man in a way, I presume, is a Turk. He no sooner loves a woman than the savage within him suggests hiding her from all the world on the same principle that a miser locks up his gold. However, the love of a

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woman that cannot endure all tests is not worth having. A woman should ever be on the defensive and should withstand the flattery of our sex as easily as an iron-clad can repel the harmless shots of a toy pistol. It may be said that only a few are equal to the ordeal. Very well, there is no man who wants even a few—one is a kingdom, if it is the right one.

“Boast and Ruth may be old acquaintances, but surely they are not friends. Hers is too lofty a character to form an alliance of friendship with one like Boast. He is cold, critical, calculating, and I believe not only a knave, but a coward.”

Walking on in an aimless way, he followed a path that led by the Shonbar and on towards the Peacock. Presently he saw a well-dressed man of middle age coming towards him. There was an unmistakable look of good living and prosperity—an air of presumed superiority and authority—about him. His round, fat face was smooth shaven, except for a bristling, dark mustache. His nose was large and obtrusive, and in his shirt front glittered a diamond of great value, while its counterpart reflected the morning sun from a massive ring on one of his short, thick fingers.

“Good mornin’,” he said.

Fred returned the salutation, and the pompous

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stranger introduced himself as Rufus Grim, principal owner of the Peacock.

"Yes, I have heard of you," said Fred.

"You're the young man from New York, I reckon," said Grim.

"New York is my home."

"Yes, I have also heard of you, and knowin' you was one of them paper men, I rather thought you'd come over and see me and the 'Peacock' before this. She's a fine property, I can tell you; none better. If you'll walk down this way a little, you can see the old prospect shaft where the precious metal of the Peacock first come to light."

Fred eagerly consented and soon they came to the old open shaft near the brow of the mountain, overlooking the village of Gold Valley and the lands below.

"Here," said Rufus Grim, with a wave of his fat hand, "is where I started diggin' many a year ago. I was one of the first in this minin' camp. Sometimes I didn't know where the next meal was comin' from, but I worked on day after day; first for wages, and then for a share in what, at that time, seemed a dead failure. I stuck to it; the other fellows didn't. Finally I bought out the others, and if you've heard much about this here Gold Valley and the rise and shine of her mines, of course, you've heard about me.

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"In fact, I'm a self-made man," he said, with that ill-breeding which is merely self-respect when covered with a sufficient layer of gold. "The story of the Peacock and me bein' close, you wouldn't very well hear of one, and not hear all about the other."

"Much has been told me about you, Mr. Grim," replied Fred, "and I am delighted to have the pleasure of knowing you personally."

"Yes," said Grim, as he looked away towards the valley that nestled at their feet. "I allow you've heard much about Rufus Grim that is not true, and precious little that's good." He waited a moment as if expecting a reply. Finally Fred said:

"One usually does not care to know what people say; it only hardens hatred, smirches the soul, increases vindictiveness, and in time reduces the standard of social ambitions to a level as low as the things the critics are pleased to say of us."

"Yes," said Grim, in a half comprehending way, "it's dead sure them busy-bodies of Gold Valley have told you that worn-out old story about Gideon Gibbons and Marc Casey and how bad I served 'em, but I can tell you," he continued wrathfully, "it's all a lie, a blankety-blank lie, all they say or what you've heard. No, sir, I've climbed the ladder step by step and made my own fortune, and

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whatever I am today I've no one to thank for it but myself."

When a man fails, nine times out of ten, it is his own fault; when he succeeds, he is responsible about one time in ten—the other nine, his success is purely accidental. Whatever truth there may be in this statement, Rufus Grim believed his achievements in acquiring a fortune were due to his greatness, his indomitable energy and perseverance.

"I assure you," said Fred, "I have heard nothing particularly to your discredit."

Rufus Grim looked at Fred as if he disbelieved, and then expressed surprise that no one had spoken disparagingly of him. "If you get acquainted with that young scoundrel, J. Arthur Boast, he'll tell you quickly enough—a pack of lies; how I stole from Casey and Gibbons their share of the mine; but I say it's false," he continued, vehemently, as he struck his fat hands together; "not a word of truth in it. No, sir; not one.

"You see," he went on, "I had this here timber put around the old shaft to keep it. It's pleasin' to me to come here now and then and think over the tough times of my prospectin' life and the changes that have come." As he said this, he again brought his two fat hands together as if to emphasize the value of the transformation.

"Yonder is my home," he said, waving his hand

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towards an elegant residence, surrounded by beautiful grounds and located on the outskirts of the village. "If there's any better in the Fish River minin' district, I don't know it."

"The place is indeed most beautiful," said Fred.

"Come and see us whenever you like," continued Grim. "I can't promise you more'n this, that you'll be welcome." Grim made this last remark as though bestowing a great favor upon a stranger within the gates of Gold Valley. One might have imagined him Lord-Mayor of some municipality granting the freedom of the city to a favored guest; nevertheless, Fred thanked him for the invitation.

It is a sad commentary upon our Western life that so little dignity goes with new found dollars, although the number of those who would assume to be dignified are legion.

With a word of farewell, and an awkward bow to Fred, Grim walked away towards the shaft house of the Peacock, and Fred turned back towards the hotel much refreshed, and not a little interested in the fragments of the narrative he had heard from the owner of the Peacock.

"I must winnow out the chaff—there are some rich news kernels hidden away in this man's story," he said to himself.

At the appointed hour he called for Ruth, and soon they were walking briskly along the roadway

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towards Silver Point Lake. Ruth was all buoyancy and animation, and anticipated with pleasure the two-mile walk that lay before them. She had followed these mountain paths from earliest childhood, and felt no fatigue from a tramp of ten or a dozen miles.

Ruth's mother had been a woman of education and good breeding and belonged to one of the oldest families of Baltimore. She died when Ruth was but a little child. A spinster sister of Mr. Hilliard tried to persuade her brother to give his daughters into her keeping, while he was leading a miner's life in the mountains, and permit them to be reared to womanhood at the old Hilliard home in Virginia. But Ben Hilliard could not consent to this. There is a love in some men's hearts that crouches and stands guard, like a ferocious lion, over the living representatives of a memory. The loss of his wife was a severe blow and he could not think of parting from his daughters, Virginia and Ruth. Therefore, Aunt Phoebe had turned aside from her beautiful Southern life and consented to make her home in the hills and take upon herself the care and training of her brother's children. It was a sacrifice of love—but there is an inexorable law of compensation.

Aunt Phoebe was an accomplished woman and possessed a finished education not only in the classics, but in music and painting, and had been a most

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painstaking teacher of her young nieces, who matured into womanhood with minds enriched and in a way polished, while the physical development of both was in keeping with the wild freedom of a health-sustaining mountain country; yet, perhaps, Ruth had been the more apt pupil. One loved the hills for their sunshine and freedom, the other for the gold they might give up, and the comforts that gold could purchase.

In later years, however, Aunt Phoebe had, apparently, become greatly dissatisfied with her brother and his attachment to the Shonbar and had developed a slightly criticising, if not a querulous disposition, which at times was very annoying to her brother. She allowed no opportunity to pass without expressing her opinion that he was wasting his time while working on the Shonbar.

As Ruth and Fred walked along that morning towards Silver Point Lake he could not help glancing at the daintiness of his companion's attire, and the ruddy glow on her cheeks, as he listened to her narration of many excursions which she had made with her father, far over some of the tallest mountains that lay before them, and of numerous "fish fries" they had enjoyed at Silver Point Lake.

As he heard the low music of her voice he mentally speculated as to what sort of friendship, if any, could possibly exist between such a gentle creature

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and J. Arthur Boast. Turning her large blue eyes towards Fred, Ruth said: "We may have company at the Lake."

"Why," asked he, in some surprise, "how is that?"

"Last evening I received a note," replied Ruth, "from Helen Goodwin, inviting me to go horseback riding today. I explained my previous engagement with you, and just before starting this morning word came from her that she and her cousin, Arthur Boast, would like to join our fishing party. Of course," she said, with a sweet little laugh, "you do not know Helen Goodwin. She is Mr. Rufus Grim's step-daughter. Mr. Grim married Mrs. Goodwin when Helen was a girl in her early teens. Mrs. Goodwin is Colonel Boast's sister, and Helen and Arthur are, therefore, cousins."

Fred did not fancy the prospects of meeting Boast, and felt that his happiness for the day would be spoiled if Boast was to be one of the fishing party. Manlike, he was inordinately selfish and wanted Ruth all to himself.

Opposition to a man's wooing destroys nothing, it merely builds the flood gates higher and makes the drama of the future more promising. There is a microbe of madness, however, that creeps into the heart of even the fairly unselfish man when the woman he loves is liable to be monopolized by an-

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other, but even such a state is more complimentary to a woman than the cool selfishness of indifference.

"I have met Mr. Boast," said Fred, with just a tinge of resentment in his voice.

"I hope you like him," said Ruth.

"May I ask why you hope so?"

There was no maidenly blush on Ruth's cheek as she replied with the simplicity of a child.

"Why, Mr. Rockwell, there is hardly anyone who cares for Arthur, and I am sometimes very sorry for him. How can any man be happy unless there is felt for him a sympathetic friendship?" She looked up at Fred with her great, soft, violet eyes of innocence and pleading.

"Mr. Grim," she went on, "says very hard things about him, and no one seems to be his friend. My interest is not so much for him as for the class to which he belongs. I hope you understand me?"

"Perhaps he is unworthy," said Fred, "but there may be an undiscovered thread of good running through the warp and woof of his character. Your way of putting it almost persuades me to give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Thank you. We may judge music, art, fame and power, but it is hardly wise to apply the same rule to a human being, is it? I try to judge Arthur leniently, to make excuses for him. He seems to be so in need of someone's sympathy. We are all grop-

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ing in a fog, and we do not know why one is more blind than another. Mr. Boast may be a bad man, but if he is, I do not even wish to know it. I only wish it known that I am brave enough to believe in the good, and somehow humanity appeals to me, especially the unfortunate.

“Why,” she went on, “I would go into a prison to give the encouragement of kindness to even a law-breaker. The choice between pride and humility must be forgotten in the presence of humanity. Goodness, not greatness, is a simple little symphony, but it carries in its rhythm the golden key of much justice—yes, happiness.”

CHAPTER XII

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ARRIVING at the Lake by a winding path, they found themselves on the banks of a sheet of water several hundred feet wide and perhaps a mile in length. The distinct reflection of the foliage and trees of the mountains which rose a sheer thousand feet on the opposite shore, made a double picture of enchanting loveliness.

"We have been waiting for you," said Helen Goodwin, in a flute-like voice. She was a cooing sort of girl, with a dainty lisp evidently regarded by herself as quite fetching. She embraced Ruth, giving her a hurried kiss and in a half *sotto voce*, lisped, "How beautiful you are today."

Fred was presented, and Helen honored him with one of her pronounced bows. There was no alternative, as Boast extended his hand and observed that he had met Mr. Rockwell before, but to accept the situation and make the best of it.

Helen Goodwin was a young lady of about twenty-five, rather tall and slender, with a wasp-like waist, a small face, and heavy braids of dark brown hair which corresponded in color with her

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long eyelashes. Her eyes never looked straight at one, but she continually practiced the habit of shy observation, doubtless considering it fascinating. Her mouth was small, her lips pouting, and there was a noticeable dimple in her chin. Beauty is never so perfect that it is not fearful of a poverty of incompleteness, and Helen Goodwin was not averse to artistic adornment.

There was a delicate pink upon her cheek, which, Fred noticed, did not come and go as the day wore on, but remained as one of her permanent features, as if she and nature had disagreed upon the tint of her complexion, and she had triumphed. In her movements there was a poetry of motion which admirably fitted her slow tones of lisping speech.

Boast was ready, however, at any time to neglect his stylish cousin to engage in conversation with Ruth, but there was some consolation for Fred in the belief that Ruth did not seem to favor Arthur Boast's attention.

"How Arthur and Ruth are enjoying themselves," lisped Helen, in a sweet, confiding way to Fred.

"Do you think they are having a more enjoyable time than we are?" asked Fred.

"Not more than I am," she replied demurely, "but possibly more than you." This was followed by a silvery laugh.

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"I fear I am not very entertaining," he replied.

"On the contrary, Mr. Rockwell," said Helen, "I think you are very charming. Perhaps you will not regret it if I try to entertain you. Are you from Virginia?"

Fred did not reply at once. He was studying this artful woman. To himself he said, "Without a conscience and clothed in beauty, what may not a clever woman do?"

Aloud he replied, "No, I am not from Virginia. I was born and reared in New York City."

"The Hilliards are Virginians. They seem to think all good people come from Virginia. I sometimes wish I had been born with an F. F. V. title."

"I never noticed that peculiarity either in Mr. Hilliard or his daughter," replied Fred.

"Oh, I don't mean they are affected, Mr. Rockwell. Don't think me so horrid as to criticise. Really, is not Ruth, the violet maid, as I call her, one of the sweetest little darlings in the world?" Helen's pretense of love for Ruth Hilliard was as plainly fraudulent as her lame effort to substitute the spurious for the true.

Fred was thoroughly bored, and suddenly turning to Helen, forcing a smile as he looked into her pretty, up-turned face, replied:

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"You ask so many questions, Miss Goodwin, that I do not know which to answer first."

She looked archly at him and said: "Never mind, do not try to gratify my curiosity, for I know I would be dissatisfied, no matter what your answer. Isn't this fern beautiful? Really, Mr. Rockwell," she continued, in a half confused way, "I really do not know what I am saying. I am afraid you will think me very stupid."

The well modulated and lisping voice of Helen Goodwin possessed a certain charm, a sort of fascinating clever mastery of enunciation. There are feminine pagans today just as ferocious to break the hearts of men, as were the women of the ancients anxious to break the bones of the martyrs upon the altars of Baal and Jove. Helen Goodwin was such a type—dangerously strong, and Fred found himself interested in studying the difference between the sweet, unaffected, gentle Ruth, and the adroit, shrewdly calculating and beautiful Miss Goodwin.

A woman may be never so honest at heart, yet she will unconsciously envelop herself in a mantle of coquetry and wear it so persistently that in time she will believe it to be a part of herself; yet, after all, it is a most pitiable thing for even a woman of this type to awaken and learn that an epoch of her life has been only an incident in the career of her unwisely adored.

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"Hers is a strong character," was the non-committal reply.

"Oh, you think that, do you?" said Helen, lisping and laughing in her quaint, silvery tones, as she gave Fred another pin-prick. "You are not the only one who thinks that way. Of course, I mean Cousin Arthur. He's awfully smitten."

"Indeed!"

"What a beautiful picture," said Helen presently. "The waters mirror the trees and mountains so distinctly. Come, let us look over the bank at our own reflections!"

"Here, I will hold your hand," said Fred, "and prevent your falling. There—can you see yourself?"

"Oh, splendidly," lisped Helen. "It is as clear as a French plate mirror. Look at your reflection, Mr. Rockwell."

"No, thank you," laughed Fred, "not so long as I can look at you and nature."

"Some people believe that flattery is a currency like gold; good in all marts of the world, Mr. Rockwell. I thought better things of you."

"And why of me?" said Fred teasingly.

"Ruth has spoken of you so many times," she replied, "and in such complimentary terms, that I was very eager to meet you. Indeed I had quite made up my mind that you were different from other

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men. Let us turn down this way. I believe the fishing will be better. Let me see—what was I saying? I thought you must be different; but I guess all men are alike.”

“I feel highly honored,” said Fred, “to know that Miss Hilliard should have spoken of me at all.”

Helen looked at Fred for a moment in silence and then said:

“How conceited men are. However, there is no sentiment, none whatever, I assure you, in Ruth. It will never be ‘Freddie, dear’ with her, but always ‘Mr. Rockwell.’ Now, with others of us it might be different, don’t you know,” and she laughed at her own audacious insolence.

“Your frankness is unmistakable, Miss Goodwin,” said Fred, smiling in spite of his chagrin, and his desire to shake this representative of feminine duplicity.

“Do you think so?” was her retort, with a lisp.

“Yes; and as for Miss Hilliard,” Fred went on, “I beg to differ with you. She possesses in a high degree that sentiment peculiar to children of nature. She loves all that is natural, and in the tenderness of her heart pities the assumed.”

“How unfortunate, Mr. Rockwell,” said Helen, “that love and admiration are not always reciprocated.”

Before Fred could reply to this scratch of the

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hidden claw, Ruth called to them, and soon after she and Boast came up, declaring the day had been a great success. Arthur and Fred divided the catch equally, and soon, with baskets swinging over their shoulders, they started for home.

Helen was profuse in her invitations to Mr. Rockwell to call, and he promised to do so, but was very glad when they separated and he had Ruth all to himself.

"I hope you have enjoyed the day as much as you anticipated," said Ruth.

"If I am anything," said Fred, "I am frank, and therefore I confess that I would have enjoyed it far more without Boast and his pretty cousin."

"I knew you would think her pretty," said Ruth. "Every one does."

"And do you?"

"Yes, indeed," assented Ruth. "I have seen no one, not even in your great city of New York, half as handsome as Helen."

"You are generous in your praise," replied Fred.

"Helen has such a sweet way about her, and she always makes one feel so at ease."

They walked for a time in silence. Manlike, Fred carried on his usually animated face a look of injury. The little, dainty woman by his side divined and felt half responsible for something she had no power to control, and it hurt. The silence became

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oppressive, and at last Ruth could bear it no longer. "Are you displeased?"

Before Fred had time to reply, Mr. Hilliard waved his pipe and blew a cloud of smoke as an act of welcome to the returning fishermen.

"Did you hear my question?" asked Ruth.

"Yes," said Fred, "displeased with myself; not with you."

Soon after, Fred took his leave of the Hilliards and started for the hotel. "Yes," he mused to himself, "Ruth is a child of nature. I'm a brute to have sulked along in silence as I did. She does not know how to dissemble, and her heart is too pure to be resentful." His reverie was broken by Boast, who had arrived at the hotel before him.

Boast's shoes had been changed for polished ones, and he was as spotlessly attired as was his custom, yet he complained about his negligent appearance, and stooped to brush away the least speck of dust or cigar ash that might have found lodgment on his trousers or coat sleeves. He kept assuring Fred that he "knew he looked rougher than a miner." Even in his office at Waterville this man seemed backward about transacting business for fear of soiling his fingers with ink, or getting his desk out of order. The student of fashion-plates seldom contributes to the dynamics of progress.

Stepping into the corridor of the hotel they found

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seats near the open door, and Fred determined to squeeze this human orange dry, and gain as much information as he could from what Boast might have to say. As they seated themselves he said:

“I met Mr. Grim this morning.”

“Oh, did you?” replied Boast. “There is a man,” he exclaimed quickly, “that ought to be hanged. He is a robber!”

“Robber?”

“Yes. Fifteen years ago my father was the richest man in this part of Idaho. He was engaged then, as now, in the cattle and horse ranching business. He owns a very large ranch near here. Grim came to the mining camp without a dollar and worked by the day. As opportunity presented itself for him to steal from his associates he not only stole everything in sight, but by fraud and misrepresentation secured possession of the Peacock mine, in which my father had a small interest. He is an unprincipled knave, and an ignorant old boor.

“Ten years ago he married my aunt, the widow Goodwin, who is fully fifteen years his senior, because he wanted a position in the best society Gold Valley afforded, and a home. My aunt is a stickler for all that is polite, but notwithstanding her training and all of old Grim’s wealth, she has been unable to gild him over with even an appearance of respectability, learning or decency. Breeding begins in the

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cradle, and all the gold in Golconda cannot make a shield that will hide the ugly scar of impoverished training. I never even call at their home. They own, perhaps, the finest residence in this part of Idaho.

"If you will talk with Rufus Grim an hour it will be a wonder if he does not tell you that I am the biggest scoundrel outside the penitentiary; and it is all because my cousin Helen is my friend. Sometimes I think he is afraid I will marry her. I believe he is in love with Helen himself, and is only waiting for my aunt's death."

"You astonish me!" exclaimed Fred.

"It may be unwise for me to talk so plainly, Mr. Rockwell, but when I think of that old reprobate I become desperate. I believe we hate people not only for what they are, but for what they are capable of being."

There was certainly no half insinuation in this statement, but rather a bold denunciation of the rich miner.

"I think," said Boast, "we had better have something to drink. I have a bottle in my pocket, but you are not very sociable, and I presume you will not drink with me."

"No," said Fred, "I am just as much obliged, but I do not require any stimulant."

"I have abstained all day," said Boast, "out of

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respect for the ladies." His voice began to sound piping, and his restless eyes no longer looked squarely at Fred, but confined themselves to sidelong glances, as if he were trying to discover what Fred's feelings were towards his cousin and Ruth.

"They are pretty fair girls, eh, for the mountains? I mean the ladies."

Fred answered in the affirmative.

"My cousin is terribly taken with you, Mr. Rockwell; if she were not my cousin I would feel jealous of you." As Fred made no reply, Boast continued: "I know I am going down hill at a pretty rapid rate, on a regular toboggan sort of a slide, towards Hades, and all on account of red liquor." Tipping up the bottle he took a swallow, coughed immoderately, and made a wry face, as if he were mentally consigning to perdition all the red liquor in the world.

"There's only one thing that will ever save Helen Goodwin, and that is for old Grim to *die*. My aunt would inherit his wealth, and, of course, in that event, Helen would be an heiress. At present she is entirely dependent upon Grim's exacting generosity. I understand that Mr. Hilliard has about reached the three-hundred-foot level. If I have one hope greater than another, it is that he will strike it ten times richer than old Grim ever did. In that event,"

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he went on, as he furtively glanced at Fred, "there will be another heiress in Gold Valley."

That night, after Fred found the seclusion of his room, he worked far into the early hours of the morning, finishing a letter to the *Banner*; a letter full of decided opinions.

CHAPTER XIII

A STAGE RIDE

THE following morning Fred forwarded to the *Banner* office a two-column article which he considered the finest of all his Western letters.

When his letter was received, the chief was at Buzzard's Bay, enjoying a much needed rest. The assistant managing editor did little more than glance at the manuscript, and observe to the dramatic critic as he hung the copy on the hook, that Rockwell was certainly sending in some excellent articles from the West.

The article was headed, "Two Honorable Exceptions." It proceeded in the most logical manner to give the output of the precious metals from the mining town of Butte City.

Fred had spent considerable time in preparing this article, and every statement was supplanted with irrefutable proof. The latter half of the letter was devoted to Waterville, and the agricultural resources of the Thief River Valley. The exports of surplus crops had increased in three years' time from one hundred carloads per annum to three thousand carloads, and a clever comparison was drawn between

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the farmers of New England and other Eastern States, and those of the great Thief River Valley, showing that for a given amount of labor, the farmer in the Thief River Valley received at least three dollars where the Eastern farmer received one.

The wonderful water-power of the rapids of the Thief River, where the new town of Waterville was building, was also dwelt upon, as well as the central location of the new city, not only from a local standpoint, but as to the entire northwestern section of the United States. The yield of wheat and other cereals was briefly referred to, all showing that Rockwell had been most painstaking in gathering statistics for the article.

The managing editor at Buzzard's Bay was enjoying his smoke the following morning when the *Banner* was laid on his table. Looking it over leisurely, his eyes caught the headlines, "Two Honorable Exceptions." In a moment he was all animation. His cigar was permitted to go out, and for the time being everything in general was neglected as he fairly devoured every word and sentence of the article. Then he paced back and forth and swore like a pirate, declaring he would not have had the letter appear in the *Banner* for ten thousand dollars.

"To think," he said, "the very thing I sent that young fool Rockwell into the West to accomplish, he has in this one article spoiled forever. If one-

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tenth of the energy we put forth in trying to explain away our mistakes were employed in preventing them, there would be no errors worth while in our lives.

"Half a dozen of my friends have been asking me about mining investments in Butte City. I have pleaded ignorance, but assured them we had sent a trusty man to investigate, and they could expect reliable information through our paper. Here it is, and a pretty mess he has made of it. Young Rockwell is certainly not a genius in his profession, for a genius in the literature of journalism is one who writes things cleverly and convincingly for their artistic value and taste, and not because he believes either in the sentiments or the deductions.

"This man," said the managing editor, angrily, "has completely lost his head; only one thing will bring him to his senses, and that is a prompt dismissal from the *Banner* force. The sin of misdirected energy has to be paid for with the last pence in the purse."

Accordingly he wired the assisting managing editor, directing him to notify Mr. Rockwell by letter that his services were no longer required.

The evening before starting for Waterville, Fred had been at the Hilliards', and when Ruth said good-bye to him in her sweet, gracious way, and assured him she would be lonely when he was gone, he felt

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like declaring then and there that he would stay on forever, if she would but make the request. She gave Fred a letter of introduction to her sister, Virginia, upon whom he promised to call as soon as possible after reaching Waterville.

Gideon Gibbons was an excellent whip, and adorned the top of the stage-coach in a fashion all his own. He chatted away to Fred in a loquacious manner, recounting reminiscences about various mountain gorges here and there where fine specimens of float rock had been discovered at different times. Again, he would tell of some thrilling adventure with the Indians, and of marvelous escapes. Gibbons invariably figured in these narratives as one of the principal characters.

"I don't reckon you've met Grim, have you?" he said.

"Rufus Grim?" said Fred. "Yes, I had the pleasure of meeting him only a few days ago."

"I 'spect," said Gibbons, "that Rufus Grim is the biggest scoundrel in these 'ere diggin's. He'll never die of enlargement of the heart, although in time it may prove to be too small a pump for his massive cussedness. He thinks he's pretty peert, but Marc Casey and me'll teach him afore long that other people can be mighty sight peerter than what he is. The only hearty, overgrown regret that I've never been able to get rid of is that I didn't twist his

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neck ten years ago. That 'ere man has a soul so small that ten million like it could dance a horn-pipe and an alamand-left on the point of a cambric needle."

"What grievance have you," asked Rockwell, feigning surprise, "against Mr. Grim? One would naturally suppose that the owner of the richest mine in the Fish River district would be respected instead of disliked."

Gibbons pushed his sombrero back from his forehead, as if to relieve his pent up feelings, swung his long whip twice around his head and yelled lustily as he cracked it sharply over the backs of his dappled leaders.

"I reckon one can't always jedge by appearances," he said, as he expectorated a supply of tobacco juice at a clump of sage-brush by the wayside.

"When Gideon Gibbons says that Rufus Grim is a scoundrel he's a pretty good jedge of what he's sayin', and he mighty near means what he says, pardner. Somebody's goin' to be jerked out of the kinks afore long, and—twixt ourselves—I think that somebody's Rufus Grim. Marc Casey and me are old pards, and we've employed Lawyer John Pilcher. He's the corporation attorney for the Waterville Town Company. You won't be takin' no chances, pardner, in bettin' your last dollar that old Grim will

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think somebody's after him with a sharp stick and a diamond drill in the end of it afore John Pilcher gets through with him. Perhaps it's amusin' to Rufus Grim to think he's got Casey and me waterlogged, and staked out on a poor range, but he won't be so tickled some dark night afore long when he finds we've broke camp and moved on to our own pasture.

"I tell you, Jedge Pilcher is a cuss in the court room. He can whip his weight in wildcats in a law suit, and the man who can deliver the goods of absolute evidence in a legal contest is the one who gets the decisions from jedge and jury. Of course, I don't mean that John Pilcher is goin' to leave the Town Company; he'll never do that so long as a lot can be sold; he says so himself. Marc and I have made a bargain with him, and old Grim is goin' to be ousted. The Peacock belongs to Marc Casey and me. What do you think of that?"

"I assure you," said Fred, "this interests me very much. It is usually supposed, I believe, that Grim owns the Peacock."

Again Gibbons' long whip cracked with the suddenness of a pistol shot over the backs of his horses, as he said:

"I don't tell everybody, pardner, but I 'spect it makes no difference to you. You seem reasonable and not one of them fellers that are sharp after

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money. You see, Rufus Grim came to Gold Valley a good many years ago, and he was so darnation poor he couldn't buy a meal's victuals. Marc and I staked out the Peacock. We had found some mighty rich float in that part of the mountains, and we knew the precious stuff was not far away. We 'grub-staked' Grim and put him to work, and while he was a-workin' he struck a pocket and found free gold—a regular vault full of yellow stuff.

"He commenced his treachery by stealin' every grain of it, and then cleverly timbered up that part of the shaft and continued diggin' in the opposite direction, endeavorin' to get away as far as possible from the place where he made the discovery. Maybe he was gettin' away 'cause it haunted him, but it didn't haunt him enough to make him honest. He got his nerve back somehow and went on with his stealin' and thievin' plans.

"Well, by and by, Marc and me got tired of payin' out assessment money, and we sold out the Peacock for a mere song to Grim. Soon after the name of Rufus Grim was known all over the Fish River district as a bonanza minin'-king. Then maybe Marc and me weren't madder'n hell. He organized an immense minin' company, and claims he owns most of the stock hisself. Within six months after we were cheated out of our rights in the Peacock he was

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a rich man, and he's been goin' like a scared wolf ever since, gettin' richer and richer.

"Marc Casey and me have a whole lot of evidence, and John Pilcher says that if we can prove what we say, that we've a lead-pipe cinch on the Peacock. The papers are bein' drawn up, and things are a-goin' to be sizzlin' hot for Rufus Grim afore many moons go over his head, I can tell you."

"'Gold, gold, bright and yellow, hard and cold,'" quoted Fred. "Wealth and golden opportunity always seem to go together to a man who has neither." Fred expressed both surprise and sympathy at the injustice Gibbons had sustained.

"Say, pardner," said Gibbons, "I kind of reckon you're shinin' up a little towards old Hilliard's gal, ain't you?" and he nudged Fred in the ribs with his elbow, and smiled benignly from under his sombrero.

The question was so unexpected that Fred hardly knew how to reply. "I hope," he said, "that I am not in disfavor with the young lady, or her father, either; I own an interest in the Shonbar."

"The devil you do!" said Gibbons. "Well, if there's a man in these mountains, pardner, who ought to strike it, old Ben Hilliard's the one. He's been stickin' to the Shonbar for a good many years, and is one of the squarest men in the Fish River minin' district, while that gal of his—why, she's the gem

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of all these diggin's. I did think J. Arthur Boast had the inside track on the Hilliard ranch. I don't like Boast; he's a low down onery cuss. There's only one point on which we agree—we both hate Rufus Grim.

"Lately, I 'lowed as maybe Boast was a-playin' second fiddle; but then you can't tell how a game of hearts is a-goin' until the last card is played."

Fred made no reply, but the mention of Boast's name did not add to his enjoyment in the ride to Waterville, where they arrived late that night.

"I remember my first visit to Waterville," mused Fred, smiling at the remembrance.

In most lives yesterday is a memory, today a reality, tomorrow a vision. "Yesterday," said Fred to himself, "should be a finger board to guide us in seizing the opportunities of the present before the iron hand of tomorrow seizes us."

CHAPTER XIV

THE TOWN COMPANY'S MEETING

EARLY the next morning Dick Ballard rapped on Fred's door, and being admitted, greeted him warmly, assuring him that he was mighty glad to see him again.

"There's goin' to be a meetin' of the Town Company, and I'm mighty sorry my lip is still so cracked. I always feel like brushin' up and puttin' on my glad rags when a meetin' of these great builders of the progressive frontier takes place."

"Well," said Fred, waiting for Ballard to go on.

"Yes, the hull kit and bilin' of 'em are here," said Ballard. "There's Colonel Alexander, Wilbur Winthrop, Tom Lee, General Ira House, and his brother Jack House, John Pilcher and Bernard McCaffrey. McCaffrey is the resident director of the Town Company."

Fred said he would be very glad to meet them.

"Well, you'll see the keenest lot of men," said Ballard, "this 'ere country ever pulled together. Every one of them is a strong man, and a hustler from the word go. What I say about 'em you'll find is *prima facie*." After a short silence, Dick Ballard

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winked one eye at Fred, as he put his hand up to his cracked lip and said:

"I've got to be mighty careful, or I'll have my darned lip bleedin' in a minute. But, say, I feel a bottle in my pocket, and I wouldn't wonder a mite but there was something in it that wouldn't taste bad. A little spirits is mighty good for a feller when he's had a hard day's ride."

Fred assured him he was much obliged, but he had been refreshed by his night's rest, and a light breakfast was all he wanted.

"We usually," replied Ballard, "accommodate fellers that want that kind of a breakfast; in fact, some of our breakfasts, they say, are too darned light. I'll go down and see what I can skirmish up for you."

At the door Dick turned and said: "Oh, yes, have you heard the news?"

"No, I do not remember having heard anything of a startling character," replied Fred.

"Well, by jiggers, I supposed you had heard all about it," said Ballard, as he leaned against the door and looked wise.

"Well, what is it?" said Fred, inquiringly.

"Well, sir, our militia company has got a new snare drum, and gosh all fish hooks, but she's a rat-tat-tat-to-er from way back." The door closed and old Dick Ballard retreated, whistling merrily, "In

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Dixie Land I'll take my stand," although the purity of his tone was somewhat marred by the condition of his lip.

After breakfast Fred was escorted to the Town Company's office, where he met the different members of the corporation. Each vied with the other in showing him attention, and while Fred was aware that the assurance of regard from these men was like many friendships—merely friendly feelings each entertains for the power the other is liable to command and extend, yet he knew they were not altogether insincere in what they said.

"I presume," said Wilbur Winthrop, as they drew a little aside from the others, "that you never before met as remarkable men as you see in my associates." He looked radiant, inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his vest and continued:

"Colonel Alexander is possessed of one of the finest minds of any man I ever knew. Tom Lee is a whale, comes from an old Virginian family. Our attorney, Mr. Pilcher, is a star of the first magnitude in his profession, and can whip a small army in a lawsuit, while General Ira House has a reputation superior to any man west of the Rocky Mountains as a town-builder. Now, if he should go into the midst of a desert and say, 'here a great city shall be built,' you would make no mistake in taking a flyer on some dirt in that vicinity.

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"Then, there is Jack House, the General's brother, who is, in his line, a most clever sort of a man. He is sometimes called the 'conspirator' because of his ability to plan schemes against the enemy and encompass their defeat.

"By Jove, look!" continued Winthrop, pointing out of the window, while his face became animated. "Do you see that young lady on the other side of the street? That's Miss Virginia Hilliard, and I venture to say she is one of the loveliest girls in the Rocky Mountains."

"I have a message for her from her sister," replied Fred. "I shall be under many obligations if you will introduce me."

"With pleasure," replied Winthrop; "as soon as the Town Meeting is over we will attend to that."

The meeting was called to order with Colonel Alexander in the chair.

The chairman cleared his throat several times with marked vehemence, and said:

"Gentlemen, we have again met to deliberate upon the destiny of Waterville and the great Thief River Valley. It is no small matter for gigantic intellects thus to assemble as a deliberative body, to arrange, by resolutions or otherwise, questions of great moment. The selected few are alone worthy of our choicest thoughts. The leading question today, gentlemen, is that of mind over matter. It is evidence

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indisputable of a simple life to believe trustingly, and 'as man thinketh, so is he,' we are told in the Holy Writ. We have said to one another, 'Water-ville shall become a great city,' and our united efforts are concentrated in this work. The story of the bundle of sticks is as true today as when the fable was first written. Every life is strewn with remembrances of ambitions that died early in the race or of prophecies never fulfilled. Glorious is the life that finds an intellect so strong and of such sound judgment that it captivates without disturbing a belief in the doctrine that for the truly great the 'most audacious hope is infinitely better than the most rational despair.'

"The wealth, gentlemen, of our united intellects is bearing down against every opposition; with hammer and tongs we are reaching out in all directions, and we are making one of the grandest campaigns the country has ever witnessed. Power and responsibility travel together; one searches for brains to enlighten; the other for broad shoulders to carry burdens.

"Gentlemen, what is the pleasure of this meeting?"

The Colonel's earnestness could not be doubted. When he said "yes" or "no" it had such a decided tone about it that one would think a three-masted vessel had cast an anchor. As he sat down he

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fondled his gold-headed cane, with apparent tenderness, as if ashamed of the way he had abused it in emphasizing his remarks by punching it into the floor in a most merciless fashion.

John Pilcher, addressing the chairman, said: "I am proud to meet again my distinguished associates as a deliberative body. For the benefit of the beloved citizens of Waterville, who are crowding into this room of deliberation and standing in front of the windows, eagerly listening to the important proceedings of this meeting, I will say that only men in the broadest term—men with an abundance of gray matter clinging to their craniums—could possibly have accomplished the results of the Waterville Town Company from its organization up to the present time. Many men boast of conservatism when they are alone influenced by cowardice, and I feel that while we may be conservative, we are not cowards.

"Mr. President, and gentlemen, I know that our brave and untiring efforts are about to be crowned with a success little dreamed of even by the most optimistic. Our skies of hope are studded with stars of promise. From a legal point of view I am proud to assure you that the Waterville Town Company is in a most safe and healthy condition. I have frequently observed, and will say again, that I am not a seller of town lots, but I assure each and every one

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of you that I am here to stay by this Company as long as a lot can be sold. As far as legal knots are concerned, I will untie them; or, failing to do so, will, with the sharp edge of the law, cleave them asunder and sweep the rubbish of opposition into oblivion."

These remarks were greeted with great applause.

The chairman again jarred the frail building by clearing his throat, and requested John Pilcher to make a report of the assets of the Waterville Town Company.

"Mr. Chairman," said Attorney Pilcher, "I have recently looked over the list of property owned by the Waterville Town Company and find we have assets amounting to some two million dollars."

As the attorney sat down, there was a satisfied look upon his face, suggesting the contentment of a millionaire.

The chairman looked over his glasses and said: "Gentlemen, you have heard, and no doubt with pardonable elation, the statement of our honored associate, Judge Pilcher. There are eight of us, and two million means a quarter of a million each. Within two years, sirs, these assets will have doubled in value. There are men whose statements I would not implicitly rely upon without discounting them, say fifty per cent, or perhaps seventy-five per cent; but, gentlemen, when it comes to downright conserva-

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tism, my level-headed friend, the Judge, takes the jackpot. Yes, sir; I undertake to say, gentlemen, he is the king-bee of us all in cutting square into the heart of a proposition, and analyzing it with a precision that is truly remarkable; and when he says two millions, I have no hesitancy in staking my reputation that it is three millions, if it is a cent."

As the chairman sat down, he again looked carefully at his gold-headed cane, to make sure it had sustained no injury.

Bernard McCaffrey, the Town Company's resident director, addressed the meeting and said:

"Mr. Chairman, I never felt so rich in all my life as I do at the present time. I regret that my ancestors are not alive to rejoice with me in the prosperity I am now enjoying. There is a reason for this contemplated prosperity.

"First, the great natural opportunities of this wonderful valley, and, second, the unity of action on the part of the members of our Town Company. I belong to a race that believes in majorities and in the strength of united action—we weaken at nothing except the cry of the Banshee at our windows.

"I have a small matter to which I wish to call the directors' attention. It is a livery bill of some eighty dollars that is past due, and, perhaps, we had better arrange about it."

Judge Pilcher rose to the point of order, as if

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touched by an electric button. He said that such small details as paying livery bills had no place in the deliberations of this body of men. "It is the duty of the auditing committee first to approve and then look after the payment of small items like expense bills."

Director McCaffrey stated in reply that John Pilcher, as well as himself, were members of the auditing committee, and he doubtless knew that the bills had been approved long ago, but that there were no funds with which——"

"Order!" shouted the chairman, punching his gold-headed cane vigorously into the floor.

"I sustain the point of order made by this corporation's attorney. Men who are sticklers for details in business matters usually dwarf themselves into impossibilities for dictators of policies and managers of other men. Let us now proceed with the deliberations of weighty and progressive questions.

"I maintain," he said, with emphasis, "that there are truthful men among pirates, and honorable men among thieves; but they have nothing in common with the unclean hordes of Gulliver, that seek to extort money from honest men."

General Ira House sat propped back in his chair in a retired corner of the room, and until now he had maintained a rigid silence, save the labored puffs at his cigar, the smoke of which enveloped him. As

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he straightened himself he pushed his chair in front of him, lifted one foot to the seat and rested his left elbow on his elevated knee. He wore an expression becoming a philosopher.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "it seems to me we are drifting." He looked wise, and waited for a moment for his remark to take effect. "Drifting," he continued, "is a weakness. If we drift, we scatter; if we scatter, we fail. Now, gentlemen, we must not drift. There are important matters awaiting our attention. I hold in my hand a letter from a party who wants to know if Waterville would be a good place to start a foundry. Gentlemen, do we want a foundry at Waterville, or do we not? That is the question before this meeting."

As General Ira House sat down the crowd cheered lustily, stamped their feet, clapped their hands and shouts of "Good!" "That's business!" "That's the talk!" were heard on all sides among the citizens who were listening with bated breath to the proceedings of the Town Company's meeting.

"I move," said Jack House, "that we want a foundry at Waterville, and that resolutions to that effect be prepared, inviting the party, whoever he is, to locate his foundry here."

"Order, gentlemen!" shouted the chairman, clearing his throat. "Mr. Secretary, please record in the minutes of this meeting, if there are no ob-

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jections, the unanimous vote in favor of the foundry, and prepare a set of elaborate resolutions, which we will sign, inviting the party making the inquiry, to come at once to Waterville and locate his foundry."

The throng of citizens broke into cheers at this announcement, and the word was soon passed through the crowd to the farthest outer circle that this labor-employing industry was to be located at Waterville. Presently three cheers and a tiger were proposed for the new foundry, and the deliberations of the Town Company were necessarily delayed until the cheering had ceased.

Bernard McCaffrey, addressing the chairman, said: "I have received a communication from the owners of a sash, blind and door factory who seem very desirous of casting their lot with us. I suggest the importance of taking official notice of their communication."

The crowd of citizens waited breathlessly, and with a fair degree of patience, to see what was to be done in regard to a sash, blind and door factory. Judge Pilcher moved that the suggestion offered by Director McCaffrey be acted on, and that resolutions favoring the sash, blind and door factory be considered. As he sat down, three other directors seconded the motion all at the same time.

"You have heard the question," said the chairman; "unless there is some opposition we shall re-

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gard it as carried unanimously." He looked over his eye-glasses a moment, and as no one offered an objection, he brought his gold-headed cane down with a sharp rap on the floor, and cried, "Carried!"

Again the word was passed from citizen to citizen on to the waiting mob without that Waterville was to have a sash, blind and door factory. Again huzzas and cheering rent the air and impeded to a certain degree the deliberations of the Waterville Town Company.

At this juncture a clerk of the local bank—the only bank that Waterville could boast—presented himself and asked permission to address the directors.

"What is the nature of your business, young man?" asked Colonel Alexander, clearing his throat threateningly, and looking hard at the clerk over his spectacles.

"I have a sight draft for fifty dollars drawn on the Waterville Town Company, for printing stock certificates."

The chairman and his seven colleagues came to their feet in righteous indignation. "A sight draft on us?" they cried, almost in unison. Several of the directors shouted, "Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman," at the top of their voices, but in his indignation the chairman failed to take any notice of them. Presently a silence, caused by sheer exhaustion and

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consternation, succeeded the first outburst of surprise. Judge Pilcher, mounting a chair, said :

“ Mr. Chairman, I move you that Article Fifty-Seven of our By-laws be copied and certified to under our corporate seal, and delivered to this young gentleman, that he may return it with the sight draft. Here is the wording of Article Fifty-Seven: ‘ Further, that this corporation, The Waterville Town Company, refuses to honor or pay sight drafts from any and all sources.’ ”

“ You have heard the question,” said the excited chairman, bringing his cane down with emphasis. “ Do I hear a second? ”

“ We all second it,” shouted the other directors.

“ Mr. Secretary,” said the chairman, “ record the question as carried unanimously.”

Silence having been restored, Judge Pilcher again addressed the chair. “ Mr. Chairman,” said he, “ of all acts of unpardonable and unmitigated gall, I consider the one to which we have just been subjected as the most trying and humiliating. I move you, sir, that all printed matter ordered in future by The Waterville Town Company be sent to another printing establishment.”

“ Unless there is opposition we will consider the question as carried unanimously,” said the chairman. At this, the chairman took the floor, and addressing the directors, said : “ There are times, not-

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withstanding the power of our united intellects, when questions of a very exasperating nature confront us, momentarily, but they are only momentary—and we meet every crisis. It takes us a very short time to decide, and with us, decision is action.

“In my experience I have observed that, occasionally, storms of opposition sweep down upon men like an irresistible avalanche. The strongest character is the product of the fiercest struggle, and resistance will only add to his power. At such times it is seemly to retreat to some well protected place and let the storm tire itself out, beat itself into exhaustion, so to speak—until its very protest becomes a pathetic silence. Refreshed with the rest we have had we may then safely sally forth, and with renewed vigor, arrange a flank movement on the enemy and everlastingly choke opposition into a timely opportunity teeming with pleasant surprises.”

When the chairman sat down, he motioned Fred to his side, and said, *sotto voce*, “Wasn’t that a master stroke, Mr. Rockwell? Do we not meet and dispose of business questions that would simply stagger any ordinary body of men into inaction? Small battles have momentous results. Opposition does not faze us; no, sir; we know our rights and are here to fight for them.”

Fred gazed eloquently at the Colonel, but ventured no reply. The citizens were very much elated

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over the prospects of a foundry and a sash, blind and door factory at Waterville. Their gratitude to the Town Company was very marked and again evidenced by three hearty cheers and many huzzas.

After the meeting had adjourned, with much clapping of hands and cheering, the members crowded around Fred, shook him by the hand, and assured him that they had all participated in one of the most profitable meetings that had ever been held.

Once a lion and a donkey were traveling together through a great forest. The lion said to his companion, "Go into the depths of the forest where the copse is densest and bray and scare the animals out. I am hungry and would eat." Whereupon the donkey went into the depths of the forest and brayed long and loud, and, behold, the denizens of the woods were startled and alarmed and rushed out frantically into the open. Whereupon the lion fell upon them, killing many and eating ravenously.

The donkey returned laughing in self-adulation, full of a fool's conceit, and said: "Didn't I scare them?" "Yes," replied the lion, with the condescending disgust of superiority, "and had I not been so well acquainted with your sonorous thunder, I would have been scared myself."

CHAPTER X V

MISS VIRGINIA HILLIARD

DURING his first visit to Waterville, Fred had become so thoroughly interested that he was prepared to a certain degree to share the enthusiasm of the citizens and the members of the Waterville Town Company that prevailed after the meeting adjourned.

There is not only health in the ozone of the West, but the microbe that consumes on sight all conservatism, and intoxicates the new convert into believing in the miraculous. Buoyant with hope for the future, almost without understanding why, and with a blind belief that his investment would yield him an abundant return, Fred began to feel it was a lucky day when the chief of the *Banner* sent him to the Northwest, and still luckier when he fell in with the members of the Waterville Town Company.

That afternoon, accompanied by Wilbur Winthrop, he called on Virginia Hilliard.

Good sense and good manners are a sort of fraternity that makes the whole world kin, and that young lady received her callers with a grace and

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dignity that would have done honor to one who had seen much more of the world.

She was rather tall and a pronounced brunette. Her well poised head was in keeping with her graceful figure. One could not call her strikingly beautiful, but she possessed the same interesting personality, although of another type, that made Ruth, her sister, so charming.

She was both vivacious and intelligent, and possessed the rare gift of reflecting in her conversation the mood of those about her.

"My sister," she remarked to Fred, "has written me so much of you, that I have been quite impatient to meet you. I presume father is still working on the Shonbar?"

"Yes," replied Fred, "he will soon reach the three-hundred-foot level."

"And the old story will be told over again, I dare say," said Virginia, laughing half incredulously.

"Miss Virginia is not an enthusiast," said Winthrop, "in regard to the untold millions that have not yet been discovered in mining shafts."

"My observations," retorted Virginia, "have caused me to be less sentimental, if not more practical, than my dear sister Ruth."

"Oh," exclaimed Fred, "am I to understand

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that you do not share your father's belief in regard to the future of the Shonbar?"

"I am a Hilliard," replied Virginia, "and in a way, believe implicitly in my father, and certainly love him as tenderly as a daughter ever loved a parent. But, I sometimes fear he is mistaken; he has never learned by losing, and with each new loss, the fever to double the wager and risk again seemingly increases.

"To change the subject," she continued, "how do you like the West?"

"I have been favorably impressed," replied Fred. "In the East we have many brilliants that are not diamonds; in the West you have many rough ashlers that may be diamonds unpolished. At home a man is considered a villain until he proves himself a gentleman, but out here you give him the credit of being a gentleman until he proves himself unworthy."

"Thank you," said Virginia. "You certainly give promise of becoming an artist skilled in the use of local coloring."

"It is our intention," said Winthrop, "to claim Mr. Rockwell as a Western man before another year; and if Waterville continues to grow as we expect, we may persuade him to edit our first daily paper."

Soon after they rose to go. "I shall hope," said

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Virginia, "to have the pleasure of seeing you whenever you are in Waterville."

"Thank you," said Fred, "I shall be glad to call."

Winthrop remained behind, talking to Virginia a few moments, while Fred paced up and down the sidewalk. The sun was well towards the western horizon, and a bluish haze lay against the mountains in the distance. It was an Indian summer afternoon, full of quiet rest, with a gentle mountain breeze as a constant stimulant.

Presently Winthrop joined him, and together they hurried down to the station, for it was nearing train time, and they had arranged to travel together to Butte City.

"How are you impressed with Miss Hilliard?" asked Winthrop.

"Very favorably. She is, however, an entirely different type from her sister, Miss Ruth. Really, I can discover no family resemblance. Miss Ruth is fair, while Miss Virginia is a decided brunette."

The train came rushing in and they hurriedly secured comfortable seats in the Pullman. As they started Fred looked out of the window at the turbulent waters of the river, and asked where the foundry and the sash, blind and door factory were to be located.

"We have not decided as yet," answered Win-

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throp. "That will be an easy matter to arrange when the party or parties are ready to commence building."

"I presume you are selling a good many lots?"

"Well, yes," replied Winthrop, hesitatingly. "We are interesting a good many people, and it takes people to build a city. Of course, we think they are displaying much wisdom in purchasing property in this town of abnormal promise, and it goes without saying that a man usually hangs his hat near his own fireside. The triune synonyms of our language are 'truth,' 'determination' and 'freedom', and they are the cardinal virtues of the successful community builder."

"I should judge, from your remarks about Miss Virginia Hilliard, and the delighted expression on your face when we called this afternoon, that your heart abided permanently in Waterville."

Winthrop was confused for the moment as he replied, "Miss Hilliard is one of the most practical young ladies it has ever been my good fortune to meet. She is a grand woman, of energy and enterprise, spirit and speech, righteousness and repartee, with a disposition sent direct from heaven, and the good people of Waterville justly hold her in the highest esteem. This is the second year she has taught in the public school of that place."

Fred did not immediately reply, but after a

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short silence, remarked laughingly, "God is charitable, men are conservative, but women are critics from the beginning to the beyond, and I judge from her remarks that she severely criticises at times her father's faith in the Shonbar."

"Yes," admitted Winthrop, hesitatingly, "she does in a way. Nevertheless, I consider her the most practical member of the Hilliard family."

Fred flushed, turned half resentfully and looked his disapproval at Winthrop. "Ho, ho," said Wilbur, in quick return, laughing quizzically, "I was merely expressing my opinion. If there is anything more ridiculously funny than another, it is the blind trail that leads to a man's affections, and I see that your opinion is quite different."

"How fortunate it is that all men, especially you and myself, Mr. Rockwell," continued Winthrop, "are not of the same opinion. Better be a critic of your friend in time of need, than a sounding-board of servile sycophancy; the one creates lasting friendships; the other is unreliable and festers with decay."

"Very well put," replied Fred. "It is quite true that an honest difference of opinion may, as the months go on, weld one's friendships more and more firmly. The man or woman incapable of sincerity is likewise incapable of friendship." Winthrop nodded his approval. "I presume," he continued,

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“when I become editor of the first daily paper in Waterville, you will, doubtless, be president of some great banking house.”

“I hope so,” said Winthrop, thoughtfully. “If many people become interested in our new town, it will help us in more ways than one. They will ultimately move to Waterville, erect homes and engage in business; but we must not be impatient and expect too much the first year, or the second or even the third for that matter. ‘Rome was not built in a day.’ I fully believe that persons purchasing lots at the present prices will receive most excellent returns on their investment.

“You see, The Waterville Town Company was compelled to go heavily in debt at the time it commenced its operations, but by persistent and continued efforts, on the part of the various members, we have greatly reduced the indebtedness, and if the sale of lots continues, we should not, in a short time, owe a dollar. Then we will divide the unsold property, each member receiving a deed for his share.”

Winthrop seemed so happy in anticipation of the joyful time when the Company would be free from debt, and was so confident and frank in regard to the matter, that his enthusiasm was contagious, and Fred found himself so deeply interested in the work of selling lots that he proposed writing

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some of the members of the *Banner* force, who were his particular friends, advising them to send him their surplus earnings for investment.

The town boomer was at once on the alert, and in not too overly anxious a way, heartily approved. Accordingly, that night at the hotel in Butte City, Fred wrote a letter to his friends, suggesting that they put some money in Waterville dirt.

The dramatic critic, the religious editor, and the heads of several other departments of the *Banner* acted on Fred's advice at once. They knew nothing of the chief's action in regard to his dismissal, and wired authorizing him to make a sight draft on them for twenty-five hundred dollars, and to invest the proceeds in Waterville town lots.

Fred was not a little gratified to find that his last letter to the *Banner* had been copied in full by the *Inter-Mountain Blade*, and the *Butte City Miner*, with editorials referring to the articles as being particularly able, and to the writer as having the "courage of his convictions."

The article had a most salutary effect on Wilbur Winthrop's lot selling enterprise, and during the next few days he disposed of more real estate than his most sanguine hopes had led him to expect.

The last of the week Fred left Butte City for Gold Valley, via Waterville. He had in his pos-

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session additional data and statistics to support and corroborate his recent letters to the *Banner*.

At first the West had been distasteful to him, but as he became better acquainted with the customs of the people, he began to recognize the true spirit of manhood that may be found under the rough garb of the miner or ranchman.

Arriving at Waterville the following morning, too late for the Gold Valley stage, he was compelled to spend another day in the new town. Remembering Miss Virginia Hilliard's invitation, he called on her that evening and was most cordially received. In the course of their conversation she observed:

"I understand, Mr. Rockwell, that you are interested with my father in the Shonbar. I hope you did not misunderstand me or my motives when I spoke discouragingly of my father's mining prospects."

"May I ask," said Fred, "what reason you have for your pessimistic views, if they may be so termed?"

"I presume," she replied, a little nettled, "they are about as tangible and equally hard to explain as those of an optimist."

"I have a presentiment that father will never find what he is looking for in the Shonbar. My sister Ruth encourages him in a faith that to me appears a mad belief."

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“And yet, your sister may be right,” replied Fred.

“My greatest wish,” she said, “is that I am wrong and my sister is right; but I really fear, Mr. Rockwell, we shall never again see the money you have invested with my father.”

“I cannot doubt your sincerity,” said Fred, “but I am glad I entertain different views.”

“Why should I have faith?” she asked, almost petulantly. “Have I not seen father clinging to a false hope year after year, and every day, every week and every month resulting in fresh disappointment? Long ago I made up my mind that Aunt Phoebe is about correct; she says that my father has been planting money with different prospectors all over the mountains, and none of it will ever find its way back. She also predicts that father will work on the Shonbar until he dies, and never enjoy a realization of his expectations.

“I love my father dearly, and have much sympathy for him. A stranger cannot comprehend his personal charm and grandeur as does his family. He is one of the dearest characters in the world. His persuasive powers, as you doubtless know, are very great, but I feel it my duty to warn you for your own protection. Father is so sane on everything else excepting the Shonbar, that I cannot un-

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derstand why he is so foolish about that, considering his years of lost labor."

"A man who never makes mistakes never makes successes, and if your father is misled in regard to his convictions, concerning the Shonbar, then I must admit that I, too, am misled," said Fred.

There is an unpalatableness about a rude truth that is far less alluring than one mantled with the satins of deception.

The blush that overspread Virginia's face told that she felt the rebuke.

"Pardon me; I had forgotten, Mr. Rockwell, that I am not 'my brother's keeper'. I promise never to refer to the subject again."

That evening after Fred had taken leave of Miss Hilliard, he experienced a strange unrest and dissatisfaction, and while he did not admit it to himself, yet the glamour of his reveries had been disturbed, and with bitterness he thought: "Why cannot a woman remain a woman and not turn image-breaker? It is such interviews that cause my judgment to turn atheistic, and my soul to become an agitated pool of doubt."

As he walked along the dusty street, the face of Ruth came before him, and in a moment the unsatisfactory evening was as if it had never been. He forgot hope's vanishing mirage, and basked again

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in the day-dream of belief that the future held no clouds.

The love of one human being for another is a world of itself, a marvelous medley, embracing every chord in humanity's harp, and giving strength to two honest hearts that can withstand adversity as long as the rugged rocks of Gibraltar have withstood the restless waves of a restless sea.

It was late when he reached the hotel. Looking through the window as he walked up the steps, he saw Dick Ballard, who was alone in the bar-room, entertaining himself with an evening drill. He carried a long iron poker at "carry arms" and was marching back and forth with military tread. Arriving at the end of the room, he would call out, "Halt! About face! March!"

Fred was highly amused at the old man's sham drill, but finally opened the door and walked in. The transformation scene was truly wonderful. Dick was vigorously poking in the stove, although it was a warm night.

"Hello, Mr. Rockwell," said he, looking up. "I saw a mighty big rat run in this stove a minute ago, and I'm after it."

"Better charge your Militia Company on the enemy," said Fred, laughing.

"Oh, you saw me, did you?" said Ballard. "I was jes' drillin' up a little, for dress parade. Well,

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pardner, I'll set 'em up to you, and you say nothin' about it."

Fred declined the entertainment, but Ballard drank copiously from his ever-ready bottle. As he returned the cork to his flask he put his hand up to his disabled lip, and in a sort of acknowledgment of defeat, said:

"I had no business to tell a lie to you about that rat, anyway. My poor father used to tell me to think a long time before I expressed an opinion, much less a falsehood, and even if I remained silent and didn't speak at all there wasn't any special certainty but that the world would be a mighty sight better off." Then becoming more animated, he said, "I tell you, Waterville's got it, and no mistake."

"Got what?" asked Fred, as he turned to go to his room.

"Got the crack military company of the state," replied Ballard. "You ought to see 'em drill once. There's nothin' in New York City or elsewhere can touch one side of 'em for big money."

CHAPTER XVI

THE OLD MINER'S DISAPPOINTMENT

THE following morning Fred took the stage for Gold Valley. As he neared the town he found himself experiencing an impatience that was strangely at variance with any former sensation of his life. It seemed to him that the stage coach was traveling at a snail's pace, and even the good-natured "honorably-intentioned" Gideon Gibbons, with all his droll talk of frontier adventure, failed to interest him.

The business man may accept the logical course of events in commercialism with the same eagerness with which the lover accepts sentiments of affection from a loved one, but logic of business is odorless save with the smell of money, while sentiment is not only the perfume of the soul, but from it first sprung belief in immortality, and Fred was indifferent to stage gossip or speculation, and was lost in meditation and in a consuming desire to be near Ruth Hilliard.

Arriving at the hotel he found the old miner, Mr. Hilliard, awaiting him.

"Am delighted to see you, Mr. Rockwell; I

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am, indeed, suh! I presume you're almost famished; powerful tiresome ridin' in a stage coach all day. After you have refreshed yourself, suh, I shall be pleased to join you in your room. I have a matter of very great importance to discuss with you, suh!"

"All right," said Fred, in his cheeriest tones. "I trust Miss Ruth is well."

"Quite well, suh; quite well, thank you."

Happiness is a state of mind approaching temporary aberration wherein we imagine ourselves to be less miserable than we really are, provided, always, that we are filled with the additional illusion that our condition is less wretched than that we believe our neighbor is compelled to endure, and as Fred ate his supper a feeling of contentment with the whole world came over him. "Happiness," he said to himself, "is simply a matter of comparison, and a good digestion."

His advancement in his profession was gratifying. He had received several valuable hints while in Butte City in regard to a new silver mining company that was about to be organized, in which he was thinking seriously of investing a little money, and he wondered if he were not in honor bound to write to the managing editor of the *Banner* and advise him to buy some of this promising mining stock. The price was only ten cents a share, which figure he had been assured, on what seemed to be the

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best authority, would be advanced to a dollar before twelve months.

His investment at Waterville was a good one, and he believed Mr. Hilliard had good news to tell him in regard to the Shonbar. In addition to this he was once more near Ruth, whose tender blue eyes seemed ever resting upon him.

He dropped a coin in the hand of the waiter as he rose from the table, and stopped in the hallway to caress a little child whom he found playing hide-and-seek with an older companion. As he went leisurely to his room he hummed softly to himself the air of an old love song.

Oh, Life, I fear you most when you are sweetest and smoothest, most charming and chummiest, gayest and gldest, for well I know any change will be for the worse!

Soon after he was enjoying a fragrant cigar with Mr. Hilliard, who was sitting opposite him, smoking his brier-root, and blowing blue rings of smoke leisurely towards the ceiling. Fred was animated and spoke in glowing terms of the prospects of Waterville.

"Mr. Rockwell," said Mr. Hilliard abruptly, who until now had been taciturn and silent, "we have reached the three-hundred-foot level, suh!" And again he lapsed into silence.

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"Have you as yet cross-cut into the vein?" asked Fred.

"Mr. Rockwell," said the old miner, as he rose from his chair and walked back and forth in a stately manner, "we have cross-cut, suh, into where the rich ore ought to have been, but it wasn't there, suh! I must confess to you, suh, that I am greatly disappointed, but the disappointment, I am sure, suh, is only temporary. Of course, it is much richer than it was at the two-hundred-foot level, and that encourages me, but it is not rich enough, suh, to work profitably, not by a powerful sight."

The information was a keen blow to Fred, for he fully shared in the old miner's former belief that they should strike pay ore at the three-hundred-foot level.

"I will admit, Mr. Hilliard, that I am somewhat dejected, and of course you are, but every failure has its compensation, and this one may have. What do you advise under the circumstances?"

"You honor me, suh; indeed you do, Mr. Rockwell, by askin' my advice, although I know it is good, and I admire a man who will listen to reason. Whether you, Mr. Rockwell, will so regard it, remains to be seen. If you can furnish about four thousand dollars more money, we will start tomorrow mawnin' for the four-hundred-foot level, and we will then cross-cut, suh, into a vein of powerful rich ore.

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I assure you, suh, I never was more sincere in my life, than I am in makin' this statement."

Fred possessed all of the confidence of youth and good health, and his belief in the outcome of the Shonbar was far from being shaken at the first failure to find pay-ore. Then, also, suddenly rose before him, as if from a mist, the half-solicitous face of Ruth, and he fancied she was asking him to still share her father's faith in the mine.

He hesitated and was—well, he took his check book from his pocket, wrote a check for four thousand dollars, and handed it to Mr. Hilliard, saying, in a voice less harsh than dry, "How long, with your present force of men, will it require to reach the four-hundred-foot level?"

"My dear Mr. Rockwell," said Mr. Hilliard, looking carefully at the check as he accepted it, and then clasping Fred's hand, "you quite overpower me, you do indeed, suh! A great man does quickly and graciously things that can only be done opportunely; not only this, but he does them, suh, with courtly kindness, and without display; and while you may have been born in the Nawth, you are still a true Virginian at heart, and with the warm blood of the South cou'sin' through your veins.

"I think, suh, that within three months we can reach the four-hundred-foot level. I told your father that the Shonbar was a sure winner, and I

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am proud, suh, to repeat the statement to you. Friendship," he went on, enthusiastically, "is the sublimest of joys, the one indestructible quality which survives the ravages of time and lives and flourishes beyond the grave, and you, suh, have inherited the quality from your father in generous measure; you are certainly, suh, a true friend."

"Of course, no one knows," said Fred, "whether you will strike it at the four-hundred-foot level or not, but I assure you, Mr. Hilliard, that I have every faith in your sincerity, and I am eager to develop the mine as rapidly as possible. If my investment proves a total loss I will never hold you responsible. Forget the dark days—put them from you as a plague. Like the sun-dial, enter into life's log-book only the sunshiny hours. Be optimistic, and live to be old, is my motto."

"I'm gettin' along in years, Mr. Rockwell, and there are three qualities which belong only to strong men—strong both morally and intellectually—these qualities are energy, perseverance and honesty. While I have not yet struck it, still I have every confidence, suh, that we shall strike it if we stay by the Shonbar.

"My little Ruth was sorry, of course, like myself. We both feared you would be very much chagrined, and I assure you, suh, we cared a great deal more about your feelin's than we did about our

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own. To tell you the truth, suh, that little girl of mine had more faith in your lookin' at this matter philosophically than I did, but," he continued, pressing Fred's hand again, "I misjudged you, Mr. Rockwell, I did, indeed, suh, and I apologize for it."

After Mr. Hilliard had taken his departure, Fred looked over his accumulated mail. The first thing that claimed his attention was a copy of the *Banner* containing his article, "Two Honorable Exceptions". He read it through carefully, with evident pride. Not a single sentence or word had been cut out. This was gratifying to him and seemed to prove that the managing editor had confidence in his ability to select the wheat from the chaff. He laid down his paper and began opening his letters. The song he was humming died on his lips. He sat upright and stared at a letter he held in his hand. It read as follows:

Banner Office, New York City.

Dear Sir:—

I am directed by the managing editor to advise you that your services are no longer required. Enclosed find check in payment of your salary to date.

Respectfully,

J. MARTIN MILLER,
Ass't Managing Editor.

To Fred Rockwell, Esq.

He rose from his chair and rapidly paced the

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room, while great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. What had he done to merit such humiliation? The idea that it might be a practical joke for a moment found lodgment in his thoughts, but he quickly dismissed the hallucination. Again he took up the paper and re-read the article. He endeavored to think logically of some solution to the problem.

Could it be possible that because of his stalwart veracity, he was to fare far worse than the villainous devils who wear fawning masks of flattery and falsehood? The more earnestly Fred considered the situation the more distinctly he remembered the prejudiced views the chief seemed to entertain in regard to Western enterprises and investments.

"He wanted the truth," he soliloquized, "and I will stake my life that there is not a sentence in this article but that is true. In one way, perhaps, it might almost be regarded as an advertisement for the West, yet it is news, and not nearly as strong as it might have been, and still be within the bounds of truth. The same is equally true as to what I have said in regard to the agricultural and other resources of Waterville. If it was not satisfactory, why did he publish it?" he asked himself.

His only consolation was to wait for a letter of explanation.

"Oh, well," he mused, "unhappiness at best is

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only a disease that cannot flourish in a healthy brain, and worrying will not help the situation."

He figured over his check book, and found he had, all told, something over six thousand dollars to his credit, besides the four thousand dollars he had that evening given to Mr. Hilliard.

He sat by his window, which was open, and let the cool night breeze bathe his throbbing and heated brain, as he considered the advisability of returning at once to New York and demanding an explanation.

Such a course would take him away from Gold Valley, from the Shonbar, and—yes, from Ruth. It began to dawn upon him that he was in love with this wild flower of the hills.

Love, after all, is a wonderful thing—a compound, an elixir. It is a new creation from things that are old. Its mysterious ingredients come from the earth, from air, from sea—from the soft, sweet smell of earth and rain; from the air, redolent with the perfume of bursting buds, of falling petals from over-ripe roses, from the singing sea-shells of vastness and mystery—all these, and glints of sunshine from heaven, even particles of heaven itself, are brewed together in the crucible of the heart by that veiled alchemist whose presence is felt, but seen not, and when brewed aright, behold! a new potency comes forth radiantly resistless, gloriously gentle,

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and utterly unselfish, yet determined and deathless. And this is life's best, uniting two souls into one—giving double strength to each.

Doubt had flown out of the window, and only certainty remained with Fred. He loved Ruth and loved her well. Yes, there was no mistake. He wondered if this little maid of the mountains had ever thought him capable of such idolatry as he was beginning to entertain for her. And then, what of the future?

Should a man marry a woman to whom he gives idolatrous love? Can the "E" string of a violin be strung too high—so high, indeed, that it snaps and breaks like defective whipcord, while strings of lesser tension last on, apparently forever? Or, is it life's loftiest goal to find in the fulfillment of love's eternal elixir a foil for unbridled enthusiasm? Fred chose the latter interpretation.

CHAPTER XVII

AN AWAKENING

FRED ROCKWELL was not of a morose nature, and the following morning he ate a hearty breakfast, notwithstanding the two severe disappointments of the day before. While smoking his cigar he frankly acknowledged to himself that he was delighted with the picturesque scenery of mountains, rivers and lakes around Gold Valley. He did not wish to leave it, for the inspired effect of the invigorating western atmosphere had firmly convinced him that his future would be a successful one. Optimism is largely a matter of health and absence of headaches.

Everything about him had an exhilarating tone. He rather congratulated himself that he was far away from the hot and crowded city, for while this unconventional, impulsive life of the West was in some ways like a continuous performance of comic opera, still it was far more entertaining than the serious grand opera grind of the East.

He was surprised, after the first shock of disappointment had subsided, to find how indifferent

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he was becoming to the loss of his position on the *Banner*.

During the following week most of his time was spent with Ruth, and the nights swallowed up the days all too quickly, when in her society.

One morning he awakened to a keen sense of emptiness where completeness had dwelt, and a feeling of restlessness where contentment had reigned. His love for mountains, rivers and picturesque scenery was but a prelude, a prologue of promise, thumbing plaintively and yet sweetly the epilogue of a great, unselfish love that had taken root in his heart, a love for Ruth. A sense of godliness had been planted, and it was radiating through his pulsing blood.

God gives to the sincere lover joy and gentleness, gratitude and goodness, rest and reward, hope and heaven, peace and plenty, sunshine and sympathy, filling to overflowing his very soul with the attributes of nobleness.

Love is an awakening, an inspiration, dulling the edge of resentment, sharpening the eloquence of wit, impoverishing distinction, guaranteeing equality and proclaiming the omnipotence of a God.

Fred's unrest dated from a certain evening when Ruth first sang to him. He remembered how he had been charmed with her full and richly sweet voice, like the velvety nectar of some rare old vintage

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of ancient distillation. He remembered she began by striking the chords in a hesitating way, but soon the genius of her musical nature seized her with its wondrous power, and she sang with the innocent and forgetful abandon of a mountain thrush.

LOVE'S QUEST.

In the olden time, when the gods were good,
'Neath the Grecian skies of sapphire hue,
Two Parian marble columns stood,
Like steadfast friends, long ages through.

Below the wave, in a seashell hid,
Two pearls as pure as an angel's tears,
Like mated moonbeams dwelt amid
A coral grove, in the old, old years.

In the splendid days of sun-loved Spain,
Two roses bloomed in a garden fair
As they drank of the fountain's silv'ry rain,
And blent their sweets on the tranquil air.

To Venice, crowned with her golden dome,
There came two doves on pinions white;
Together they fashioned their blissful home
In that fair haven of love's delight.

But fate's fixed law all life involves,—
That dread decree of sure decay;
The marble crumbles, the pearl dissolves,
The doves and the roses pass away.

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Yet, each by a law more strange than this,
Is born anew in a fairer form;
The red rose lives in the lips that kiss;
The marble in lithe limbs, soft and warm.

In mouths fair-fashioned for greetings sweet,
The pearl's chaste beauty again shall glow;
In the fluttering hearts of lovers meet
The glad white doves of the long ago.

Or, else how come the strong swift ties,
To stranger folk who have walked apart
Till the first fond meeting of eyes with eyes
Unite them utterly, heart with heart?

And we, dear friend, we have met before,
And now is the old, sweet dream resumed;
Was it Venice? The sea? Some far-off shore?
Or deep in a court where the roses bloomed?

So, dearest, my spirit would still disclose,
Your soul's strange secret and bid you tell, '
Were you marble, or pearl, or dove, or rose,
In that old world where we used to dwell?

As she sang Fred marveled at her gift. He gave himself up to the intoxication of the song and the singer. His heart was thrilled with a strange and sweet sensation emanating from some invisible power. His soul broke through the barriers and went out to hers, and when the song had finally

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died, and the music ceased with a few reluctant chords, he knew that a great and tender love had sprung up in his heart; a love that was not for a day, but for all time.

"Miss Hilliard," said Fred, with emotion, "you are a constant surprise to me. Your playing is beautiful, while your voice is not only plaintively soft and musical, but of marvelous range. To hear you sing fills me with an indescribable longing for the loftier, nobler and gentler things of earth."

Neither Ruth nor Fred understood that not infrequently music has an ennobling sensation in it for the dulcimer-pitched nerves of virgin purity, and only a remembrance for the experienced—the sensation is a promise, the remembrance a fulfillment.

"Thank you," said Ruth. "I seldom play or sing, excepting for daddy. Your praise, however, is welcomed all the more, perhaps, because you have doubtless heard many cultivated voices."

"Yes, but there is something about your voice that—well, it pleases me greatly, and as long as I remain in Gold Valley I hope I may have the pleasure of hearing you often."

"We promise not to ostracise you altogether, Mr. Rockwell," said Ruth laughingly. "But, may I ask, how long do you expect to remain with us?"

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There was just enough hesitancy in the question to suggest interest.

"I do not know," replied Fred. "Perhaps you think it strange that I have remained as long as I have. To be frank with you, Miss Hilliard, I have lost my position on the *Banner*."

"Lost your position!" exclaimed Ruth, with unmistakable concern. "How unfortunate."

"Yes, I regret it," replied Fred, "whether it is a misfortune or not. I had an offer today to take charge of the *Gold Valley Prospector*, and am thinking seriously of accepting."

"I am surprised, but I know daddy will be delighted if you decide to remain with us in Gold Valley."

"Of course," said Fred thoughtfully, "there is quite a difference between the *New York Banner* and the *Gold Valley Prospector*—one is a cosmopolitan daily, and the other a country newspaper without any special circulation. It would be profitable to me only as I increased its circulation and its importance to advertisers. I shall not decide for a few days, meanwhile an explanation may come from the *Banner*."

"I have almost decided that it would be advisable to remain in Gold Valley," he continued, looking at Ruth rather inquiringly. "My confidence in the Shonbar is increasing, and I believe it is a ques-

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tion of only a short time until your father's efforts will be crowned with success."

"Mr. Rockwell," said Ruth, feelingly, "I thank you for your confidence and faith in my father. It seems that almost every one believes in his ultimate failure. I cannot tell why, but my belief is unbounded."

There is in every noble woman's heart a glint of the immortal, a spark of divinity that like a star of hope is never seen in the broad daylight of prosperity, but it comes out in all its sparkling effulgence and luster in the dark hours of night's adversity, and Ruth had been a constant inspiration and comfort to her father when every one else doubted his wisdom in regard to his mining ventures.

"Even sister Virgie," continued Ruth, "has lost hope, and at times daddy is greatly disheartened because sister and Aunt Phoebe talk so discouragingly, still I am sure that time will fully prove how mistaken they are."

As Fred rose to go that night he took her hand and said: "You are a noble daughter of a worthy father, and he is most pardonable for wishing to keep you with him in the hills. I fully understand how great a comfort and support you must be to him.

"Evidently there is nothing," said Fred, "so dear to a father's heart as the admiring love of a

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daughter, which I am beginning to believe at times is almost idolatry, and I know there must be no love on earth so precious to a daughter as the sympathetic, appreciative love of a father. We might almost wish it were not so," he continued, smiling.

Ruth seemingly did not catch Fred's point of view, and replied: "I am sure daddy cannot want me with him any more than I wish to remain. There are natures, we are told, that cannot be changed, neither emancipated from an idea, nor contaminated with fear of failure, and daddy is an example—he is true blue clear through."

Fred had become accustomed to Ruth's frankness of speech, and yet he was delighted when she said: "I shall be very glad, Mr. Rockwell, if you conclude to remain in Gold Valley. You have no idea how lonely I would be were you to go away."

His heart took a sudden jump into his throat, and there performed acrobatic feats for a moment, as he attempted to thank her. The expression on his face evidently betrayed his feelings, for she quickly drew away, as if a veil had suddenly been lifted and a discovery made. With a formality that was new to Fred she said good night in a distant sort of way, and he felt awkward, chagrined and displeased with himself.

After leaving the Hilliard home he found him-

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self in a perturbed state of mind, bordering on that peculiar style of wretchedness that always overtakes one when dissatisfied with self. He walked along the road which led up the mountain side to the Shonbar. The moon, large and brilliantly bronzed, like a sheet of copper, was just lifting itself above the eastern horizon. An odor came up from the wide expanse of sand ridges, a perfume of the valley, and from far to the westward came a vanishing sound like the dying of day, or the outward ebbing of a night-wind.

He walked on past the shaft, where the night force of men was busy working away towards the four-hundred-foot level, and soon found himself at the old prospect shaft near the Peacock mine. The little city of Gold Valley nestled far beneath him. He saw a light glimmering from one of the windows of the Hilliard home, and wondered if it meant forgiveness and hope.

There are times when the sensitive souls of lovers can hear the words of a loved one, if only whispered in the sacred recesses of the heart, when sighs are caresses on the soft warm winds of hope. He listened, but no sound came save the beatings of his own heart.

"Yes," he said to himself, as he thought of her words in regard to his remaining in Gold Valley. "I will remain, no matter what explanation may

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come from the *Banner* office," and filled with this determination he returned to the hotel.

About a week after receiving the letter dismissing him from the *Banner* force, the mail brought him a copy of that great New York paper. He looked it over eagerly to see if his last communication had been printed, but luck needs to look out for lock-outs. His letter had been rejected.

In its stead he found an article entitled "Two Western Towns," which was devoted to Butte City and Waterville. It referred in the most vindictive manner to the members of the Waterville Town Company, classed them as a lot of townsite boomers, warning Eastern people not to be caught and misled by such wildcat speculations as were offered in the Thief River Valley.

It said that the valley was one immense lava bed, interspersed with sage-brush thickets, alkali swamps, and basalt plains. The wonderful water power, it claimed, was an absolute myth; and in fact the printed statements in the circulars of these "town boomers" were deliberate falsehoods.

Another point which Eastern investors should bear in mind, the paper went on to say, was the fact that the property platted into town lots was still Government land. The Town Company had no title, and perhaps never would have. It branded the en-

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tire enterprise as the most gigantic confidence game that had ever been perpetrated on an unsuspecting public.

It further recited that the swindling operations of the irresponsible and restless "town boomers" of Waterville were exceeded in point of adroitness only by the mining operations in and about Butte City, Montana. According to the article, the mountain sides of Butte City were perforated with abandoned prospect shafts. Hundreds and thousands of dollars of Eastern money had been expended by local managers in riotous living and debauchery. The claim was made that it was a safe estimate that for every thousand put into prospect shafts in and about Butte City, not more than a twenty-five cent piece had been taken out. It spoke of the inhabitants of Butte City and Waterville as plebeians of the lowest sort and condition of life.

The worst cut to Fred, however, was the closing paragraph. It stated that the habit of promoters of these Western towns was to bribe correspondents of Eastern papers and that many were weak enough to fall, which was not only unfortunate for the journal publishing these flattering falsehoods, but a base injustice to Eastern investors who were led captive with their savings into Western "booms" through the machinations of unprincipled correspondents for Eastern papers.

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The article had evidently been written by one particularly acquainted with some single town, and who thought he knew the entire continent—some one who had so many ideas about nothing that he had but few, if any, about a tangible something.

If Fred had been nonplused upon receipt of the assistant editor's letter, he was now stunned. He thought very little of his own investment in Waterville, but rather of what his old associates on the *Banner* would think of him, for he regarded the article as a direct thrust at himself and his integrity. A man may be critical without condemning, he may even suspect a friend without sacrificing him on the evidence of mere doubt.

After waiting a few days, and receiving no further communication from the *Banner* office, and feeling too humiliated to write to his city friends, until time had dulled the blow, he concluded to go to Waterville, and see if he could make arrangements with the Town Company whereby he could at once return the money invested by his associates in Waterville lots.

The more he thought of the article in the *Banner* the more indignant he became. "There is not a manufacturing or any other kind of an institution in the East rich enough," he said to himself, "to stand such wholesale boycotting as that to which this Western country is constantly subjected by the East-

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ern press. It is not conservatism; it is downright injustice. I have not been long in the West, it is true, but my respect for it and its people is growing. Even Chicago, with all her greatness, energy and achievement, is belittled by the press of the East!

“By birth I am a Gothamite, and by education I am an Eastern man, but my patriotism for America and all that is American has never allowed me to turn up my trousers when there is a heavy fog in London. I love Englishmen because they are loyal to England and the Union Jack, and the English love the American who is clannish to America and the Stars and Stripes. Bowing to the golden calf of precedent is a scorpion whip of pain on the bare shoulders of broadest patriotism and persistent progress.”

CHAPTER XVIII

FRED RETURNS TO WATERVILLE

A FEW days later Fred took passage in the stage-coach for Waterville. It was a beautiful October morning—a morning made for happiness—both invigorating and crisp, with a touch of hilarious briskness in air and sky. There had been a slight frost the night before, but it rapidly disappeared before the genial warmth of the sun, while the russet leaves, stirred by the autumn winds, sang brokenly the coming of old age.

October is the scenic month of the mountains, and when amid them, you are in Nature's picture gallery. The sumac leaves are as changeable in color as a blushing maiden or a chameleon, and from the low green foothills to the timber-line of sombre gray far up the towering mountains, the pines and spruce, the elms and box-elders, the poplars and oaks grow in abandoned profusion. The leaves, like Joseph's coat, vary in colors from deepest green to brightest scarlet, from golden yellow to soft, dull brown. This medley of color intermingled in the gorgeous panoramic scene, lends a charm and beauty that would

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baffle the skill of the most talented artist to produce on canvas.

Fred was seated by the side of Gideon Gibbons on top of the stage-coach as they whirled along. In his face was a look of unspoiled faith in God and woman. He was thinking of the evening when Ruth first sang to him. It was music fit for the Gods—so rich, so deep, so plaintively low, so inspiring.

He could even see her now standing on the wide old porch of the Hilliard home, as she waved to him at parting. The mild October breeze had stirred the ringlets of her golden hair, and they in some way seemed laden with promise for him, for he interpreted her every word and smile as reciprocal of his own earnest admiration.

One evening she had said, when, perhaps, he had shown all too plainly the great admiration that was growing in his heart, "He that goes slowly goes safely, and he that goes safely, goes far." She was smiling while talking, and looked archly at him as if uttering a prophecy.

Fred was thinking of this when he was suddenly brought out of his day-dreams to present affairs by Gideon Gibbons remarking: "Things ain't so powerful brisk down at Waterville jes' now."

"How's that?" asked Fred.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Gibbons, as he

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startled his leaders with a ringing crack of his whip. "Can't say jes' what's the matter. But I can tell you one thing, pardner, I'm mighty glad I'm not in the real estate business. In my opinion, them real estate agents down thar will be jumpin' sideways for a sandwich before the winter's over. Already they're beginnin' to look lank, like a lot of South Sea Islanders clamorin' for a feast of baked missionary."

Fred was decidedly depressed about his town lot investments, and Gibbons' remarks merely strengthened, in a way, his fears. He was going to Waterville for the express purpose of disposing of his friends' property, in which they had invested upon his recommendation. He cared very little about his own money which had been put in town lots, for he was willing to wait or lose all, if his friends, who had trusted so implicitly to his judgment, could be prevented from sustaining loss.

Once a man said to a woman who had bitterly and heartlessly deceived him, and when they were about to part forever: "I do not care for the love I once gave you, because I was deceived into loving that which never existed save in my own imagination, and with the awakening it died. With the dying of the myth love came back in my own heart, but I am truly sorry for the love you gave me, for

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questionable as to quality as it may have been, it is now broken and lost even to the very fragments."

"In like wise," mused Fred, "I have experience returned to me for money, but my friends, if their money is lost, will have nothing but regrets for having followed my advice."

It was late that night when they reached Waterville. Fred was glad to find that Wilbur Winthrop's name was registered at the hotel, for he was very eager to see him. They met the following morning at the breakfast table. The conduct of the usually polite and entertaining Winthrop was changed to a sternness, gruffness and silence for which Fred was at a loss to account, but he said nothing, remembering that very frequently a man's nature is too nearly nude before he has breakfasted to even utter subterfuges for the sake of politeness.

As they rose from the table and left the dining room Fred went out with Winthrop and asked him how he was progressing in the lot selling business.

"How am I progressing?" repeated Wilbur, as he turned and looked coldly at Fred. "I am through and have left Butte City for good."

"How so?" asked Fred in surprise.

Winthrop was silent for a moment and then replied: "It is rather strange, Mr. Rockwell, for you to ask such a question after the publication of your last letter to that New York newspaper. The *Inter-*

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Mountain Blade and the *Butte City Miner* both copied the article. It is hardly necessary to observe that as a result it is impossible for me to sell another lot in Butte City. Those who had purchased property became so infuriated that I deemed it best for personal safety to leave the town."

Saying this, Winthrop turned abruptly and left Fred, who, for a moment, was too astonished to make reply.

Well merited praise takes away the dross from our souls, but harsh and ugly criticism adds slag to our lives, and Winthrop's words both surprised and chilled him.

A little later he visited the Town Company's office, where he found Bernard McCaffrey, the resident director, and Wilbur Winthrop deep in consultation.

McCaffrey was a man of commanding presence. His associates often remarked that his face 'was worth ten thousand dollars in an important trade of any kind. He was dignified and commanding in appearance, and when talking with him the most skeptical fell into the habit of believing every word that fell from his lips. Fred discovered that he was *de trop*, but determined to vindicate himself.

"Gentlemen, pardon me for interrupting, but I must ask your indulgence for a few moments. Will you be kind enough to read this article? I do not

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care to have any more complications and misunderstandings than have already been experienced."

He handed the resident director a copy of the *Banner*. McCaffrey adjusted his spectacles and read aloud the entire letter on "Two Western Towns." When he had concluded, Fred turned to Winthrop, "Is that the article to which you referred awhile ago at the hotel?"

"Yes," said Winthrop, gruffly, picking up the paper. "But how is this? The Butte City papers published only that part of the article criticising Waterville. How came you to write such a thing at all, Mr. Rockwell? You surely know there is not a word of truth in it from beginning to end?"

Fred looked at Winthrop, and then at Bernard McCaffrey and replied: "I did not write it." Then very tersely he explained the history of his dismissal.

"This was evidently written," he said, tapping the paper with the back of his hand, "to counteract the influence and effect of what I had written the week before."

"Of course, that puts the whole thing in a different light," said the resident director, rising and extending his hand to Fred. "I could not believe it possible that you, Mr. Rockwell, would be guilty of writing such a libelous article as this proves to be. Ignorance is the basis of nearly all misunderstandings, and complete knowledge usually entitles

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one to forgiveness, and I beg your pardon for misjudging you."

Winthrop also accepted the explanation as eminently satisfactory, and expressed his sympathy for Fred on account of the loss of his position, at the same time apologizing for his lack of cordiality at the breakfast table.

"This article has completely killed the lot-selling business for me in Butte City," he said, "but, fortunately, having made some very excellent sales during the past few weeks, the Town Company has sufficient money in the treasury to pay all debts. The last obligation will be paid off at twelve o'clock today."

"Yes," said McCaffrey, "they shall all be paid off, but it will leave the treasury in a depleted condition. The future, I believe, will prove that all is well. I hope you have not lost faith, Mr. Rockwell, in Waterville real estate?"

"No," replied Fred, "I have unbounded faith in Waterville. By nature I am a chance-taker—a castle builder, but just now my mind seems a chaotic mass of ruins."

"It would please me very much, however, if the Town Company were willing to return the twenty-five hundred dollars which I invested for my New York friends. They doubtless know of my dismissal from the *Banner* force, and have read this

castigating article, which puts an entirely new interpretation on the subject of Western investments, and I would like to clear myself from any suspicion. As to my own purchase, I am willing to take the chance."

"You must know," said Winthrop, "that you ask what is next to impossible, for notwithstanding I have, personally, the warmest and friendliest feelings towards you, and while Mr. McCaffrey may think favorably of returning the money, it cannot be done without an action of the directors."

Bernard McCaffrey invited Fred to take a seat at his desk. He would explain to him carefully, he said, the situation, believing he could prove conclusively why he would be acting for the best interests of his friends by not disturbing the investment.

"Barney," as he was frequently called by his friends, produced a great many maps and carefully spread them out on the table; adjusting his spectacles, and with his ten-thousand-dollar face looking directly at Fred by way of a prelude of what was to follow, he proceeded to go over the old, old story of the unlimited natural resources of the valley. He discussed at length and in a very entertaining and convincing manner the number of acres of land already in cultivation, the probable annual increase in acreage of farm lands, figured out results that amounted to millions of dollars if the lands were

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seeded with wheat and barley, but hundreds of millions if planted in sugar beets. Then he carried Fred from one side of the map to the other, up to the top, down to the bottom, and back again to the point from which they started. No sooner had he reached the point of arrival and departure than he struck a back trail and went all over the map again, until Fred, although a little tired by such rapid mental gymnastics, was more enthusiastic than ever before in regard to the future and final outcome of the wonderful city of Waterville.

"Barney" lit a cigar as though treating himself for valuable services rendered, and then confirmed Winthrop's statement in regard to their inability to take any money out of the treasury for the purpose suggested without first having the consent of the board of directors.

"I advise you to write to your New York friends," continued the resident director, "and tell them their investment is all right, *if*—mark, I say *if*—they have the courage to stay with it for a year or such a matter.

"Of course, this article in the *Banner* has hurt us greatly. It is simply a high-handed piece of boycotting, but the West is accustomed to such treatment from the East, and it has received similar injustice at the hands of other great New York dailies—times without number—in years gone by."

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Acting on "Barney" McCaffrey's advice, Fred wrote a letter that day to his associates on the *Banner*, and felt relieved for having done so.

He determined to remain at least a week in Waterville and study for himself the local condition of the real estate market, but before many days he began to realize the wonderful far-reaching effects of the derogatory article in the *Banner*.

A tidal wave of the ocean is generally destructive to everything in its path, even as a tidal wave of printer's ink is an irresistible moulding and voicing of opinion.

Rival towns copied the *Banner* letter, and with double-leaded editorials called attention to the town that had overreached itself. They denounced the various members of the Waterville Town Company as unmitigated sharks, and predicted that now, since the boom had been pricked with the needle of truth, the bubble had burst for all time. The city, they said, was dead.

The transient class of real estate agents and hangers-on at Waterville who had been doing rather a thriving business, said one to another: "Boys, this ends it; the jig's up. We might better go somewhere else than hang around here and see the dog's-fennel grow in the streets of Waterville."

One day Fred called on J. Arthur Boast. Pride is principally useful among the foolish in preventing

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them from seeing their own shortcomings, and thereby keeping them on good terms with themselves. Mr. Boast was one of those so-called fortunate mortals of earth who never even suspect, much less see, any fault in themselves. The mote is invariably in the other person's eye.

Fred found him as immaculately dressed as ever, and engaged in tying up bundles of legal papers, deeds, contracts and so forth.

"You look, Mr. Rockwell, as if you were quite disgusted with everything. I might say, you look as if you were blanked sore, possibly over your Waterville investments?"

"No," replied Fred, "hardly as bad as that. Are you getting ready to move from Waterville?"

"No, I am not going away; that is, not permanently," replied Boast, as he stopped to brush a speck of dust from his attire. "But I presume we shall not have any use for deeds or contracts for some little time to come, and I am therefore putting them away out of the dust and sand until the boom opens up again."

"You speak discouragingly."

"Discouragingly!" said Boast, as he seated himself on the table in front of Fred. "Discouragingly!" he repeated. "Why, hang it, didn't I tell you the Town Company would ruin Waterville? I was away only two weeks, visiting, as you know, at

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Gold Valley, and while I was gone they inflated the price of real estate and made promises right and left that were impossible to fulfill. Rival newspapers all over the country are denouncing them, and the result is that Waterville is dead. I say dead, and I mean dead, and all on account of the Town Company."

Fred was wavering. "Do you suppose," he asked, hesitatingly, "that you could possibly sell my twenty-five lots?"

Boast looked absently out of the window, as he said: "I might sell them in time by putting them on my special bargain list."

"At what price?"

"Let me see. You paid twenty-five hundred dollars for them, did you not?"

"Yes," answered Fred.

"Oh, well," said Boast, as if he were conferring a favor, "I might be able to get five hundred for them, but it would be a pretty green sort of a tender-foot just now that I could unload them on, even at that price.

"But what's the use?" he continued, facing Fred suddenly, and still sitting on the table. "What's the use of losing your nerve? Within one or two years Waterville will be all right. She can't be kept down. She has natural resources; the richest farming lands in the world, the greatest water-power of

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any inland city in the United States; marvelous veins of coal; inexhaustible quarries of building rock; unsurpassed forests of timber, and an abundance of water for irrigating purposes.

"Why, hang it, old fellow," said he, slapping Fred on the shoulder with one hand—a habit some people have while employing the other to steal your purse; "Waterville's all right. All you've got to do is to hold on both to your nerve and to your lots, and you will come out on top."

"That's all very well," replied Fred, "but one becomes seared and scarred with the fire of this sort of experience, and the ray of hope you hold out is too far away to be very encouraging."

"Every tenderfoot," said Boast, "needs a certain amount of money-losing experience in order to become acclimated in this Western country, and to become a first-class citizen. Your experience is just now beginning. After awhile you will have more sympathy, perhaps, with the unfortunate than you have at present. Losses of this sort increase a man's inclination to be sympathetic with his fellows. Mr. Hilliard will probably strike it rich in the Shonbar, Waterville will come out of the kinks, and there you are, a rich man. By the way, Mr. Hilliard must be pretty near to the four-hundred-foot level, is he not?"

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"I believe he is making very good progress," replied Fred.

"If the old man should strike it rich," said Boast, thoughtfully, "I would not mind connecting myself with the family. While it is true that a man with an object to attain in life, one who is possessed of an ambition, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, needs a wife about as much as a freighter's wagon needs a fifth wheel, still we must admit that money talks. Of course, I am not so hard to please as you New York chaps, nevertheless, I insist that the lady of my choice must be incumbered with a dot."

Fred thought of the saying that there was no necessity for a hell until greed and avarice entered into the souls of men.

"One and one make two, and two and two make four," said Fred to himself, "which is a way to state a proposition of love, providing you state it before the window of the soul has been opened to the tender sentiment of purest affection."

Boast was rapidly convincing Fred that he was a man incapable of an honest love, and he was indignant and disgusted at his cold-bloodedness, for like all men of his stamp, Boast held women as an idle toy, a plaything to kiss or to kill as evil fancies might suggest.

"I see you have no objection," said Fred, biting

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his lips in anger, "and, of course, there is no doubt the Hilliards must be overwhelmed with the honor of having you as a member of their family."

"A woman's heart is only an apple at which a fool nibbles, and a wise man negatives," said Boast, grinning wickedly. "Possibly," he went on, coolly, and a little more soberly, "if the old gentleman strikes it in the Shonbar it is worth considering anyhow. Ruth is not so bad?" There was a rising inflection in his voice and a wicked leer was on his face—not a smile.

"But, come, there's no use quarreling over something that has not happened. Our standard of morals is more largely determined by latitude and longitude than by depth and discipline, and much depends upon one's point of view.

"There is no use being down-hearted over an exploded boom as long as a fellow has a bottle of good, red liquor. I know of only one person," Boast continued, "in the entire Thief River Valley, whom I regard as absolutely honest, and modesty forbids me mentioning that person's name.

"Here," he said, as he jerked a bottle out of his pocket, "is a panacea for one's ills, and a rhapsody without a regret—until the next morning, anyhow."

Fred declined to join him in his liquor-drinking farce, and rather unceremoniously turned away and went down the street, muttering to himself, "Many

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a conceited egotist lives out his years believing himself to be a genius or an oracle of wisdom. I refuse to wait for this stylishly dressed knave to go through the ordeal of condemning himself as a drunken profligate. Of course, if a man is determined to ruin his life with alcohol and go to hell, it makes no difference whether he goes drunk or sober—only the quicker he goes the better, for even a small vacuum on earth is worth an entire half acre of degenerate drinkers and scoundrels like J. Arthur Boast. He may have a conscience, but it would be too bad if any of his friends regarded it seriously.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE INDIGNATION MEETING

FRED had been in Waterville a little over a week and his enthusiasm was noticeably subdued. One evening he discovered that a great many citizens were assembling in the town hall, and finding the crowd composed of representatives of nearly every family in Waterville, he joined the throng.

The gathering proved to be an indignation meeting, and was called to order by J. Arthur Boast. Instead of hurrahing for the Waterville Town Company, its members were vigorously denounced by the indignant citizens, and one of the speakers, after addressing the chair, said, among other things:

“Where is our sash, blind and door factory? Where is our foundry? Where is our woolen mill? Where is our canning factory? Where is our great smelting plant, and where are the other manufacturing enterprises that have been promised us by the Waterville Town Company? Echo answers, where?

“We are told that when we see a thing in the Waterville *Times* it is so, but where are these institutions of progress which have been promised to us? Outside of Waterville the newspapers claim the

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members of the Waterville Town Company to be a lot of restless town boomers. I believe what I see in these papers. The weeds are already growing in the streets of Waterville—our town is dead; not one stranger in a week alights from the train at Waterville. We have been deceived, and it is now time for an indignant community to assert its rights, and take the reins of government, so to speak, in its own hands, and give the Waterville Town Company to understand that no more bonds of any kind will be voted, or subsidies given in the future.”

A number of other speakers expressed themselves in bitter terms against the Waterville Town Company. The chairman, J. Arthur Boast, finally addressed the meeting in his thin, piping voice, and advised moderation.

He said it was true that prices, unfortunately, had been inflated during his absence, and a reaction had set in. He reminded his hearers that he was still in the real estate business, and by listing their property with him he would try to put it on his “special bargain list,” and thought that he could possibly, in time, re-establish confidence and create a new era of activity in the real estate business.

A selfish desire for future kindnesses from others usually prompts us to appear considerably generous, and Boast was very careful not to openly charge the depression at Waterville to any one in particular,

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but his insinuations left no room for doubt that he meant the Waterville Town Company. He was a man who believed he was born to be a leader, and a power among men, but he was circumscribed, not dwarfed, but diminutive to such an extent that it was an impossibility for him to be loyal to more than one man at a time, and he believed that loyalty to one required disloyalty to all others.

It was the idea of the citizens at the meeting that retrenchment was in order. One speaker advised closing the public school. The suggestion seemed to meet with favor. Old Dick Ballard pushed his way through the crowd, and addressing the chairman, begged the people to listen to reason. He talked rapidly and protected his sore lip with his hand as a covering.

"You know," he said, "if we blindly wish for a thing regardless of the cost, it is *prima facie* evidence that the wish is not a rational one. I'm school director in this 'ere township. The office sought me. I didn't seek the office. Retrenchment in any other line, exceptin' the closin' down of the public school, is, perhaps, all right, but don't take a step backward. If we don't have a school we won't have any educated people, and a town without education is worse than dead. Our public school system is our pride, and should appeal to the patriotism of every one here." A voice from the back part of the house called

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out: "Say, Dick, I thought your drum corps was Waterville's pride?" A few laughed loudly and irreverently. Ballard glared fiercely and said: "You shut up."

In conclusion he offered to give an entertainment with his state militia company for the benefit of the public school at Waterville, and became so enthusiastic that he almost forgot his cracked lip. As a consequence, during the balance of the evening he was holding a handkerchief to the injured member.

His remarks would probably have been effective, had not a fiery speaker followed him, and advanced the idea that the discontinuing of the public school would be a direct rebuke to the Waterville Town Company.

The latter speaker yelled a little louder, spoke even more rapidly, gesticulated more violently, so, of course, he swayed the fickle opinion of his hearers around to his side of the subject.

"Let it be noised abroad," he shouted, "that the residents of Waterville refuse to pay any school taxes, and then the Waterville Town Company will begin to understand that we must be consulted, or we will thwart their schemes for booming the town. All they care for, anyhow, is the money there is in selling town lots."

The speaker then asked Dick Ballard how much

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money was in the teacher's fund of the school treasury.

Ballard said that he did not know, but he could find out in a day or two. The speaker, further addressing the chair, said:

"I move you, sir, that it is the spirit of this demonstration that we quit paying taxes to support a public school in Waterville, and when the funds now on hand are exhausted that our schools be closed."

The motion prevailed almost unanimously, there being only a few feeble protests, and they were not recognized by the presiding officer.

A little later Fred felt some one plucking at his sleeve, and Dick Ballard motioned to him to follow.

"Now, sir," said Ballard, in a deep, stage-like whisper, when they were alone, "there is some mighty important work to be done. Be in the parlor of my hotel in half an hour. Say nothin'," and at this, Ballard, with a mysterious look on his face, turned and hurried away in the darkness.

Fred walked over to the hotel, and a little later found Dick Ballard, Wilbur Winthrop and Barney McCaffrey waiting for him. Ballard was very careful to lock the door securely, and then turning to the others, said:

"Now, gentlemen, we have business of importance on hand. Yes, sir; the time has come for us to act, and act promptly. Hold on; just wait a minute

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until I read you a letter. This is private," said he, tapping the letter which he unfolded with a great flourish. "This is from General Ira House, the greatest town builder in the world. Now, here's what he says:

" 'I will settle my board bill——' no, hold on; that's not the place. Here it is: 'Tell the people to be patient. Sugar is sweet, vinegar is sour, oil is smooth; with the three we make salad. This is life. The most hopeful hour is in the early morning, the brightest hour is at high noon, and the most beautiful hour, the twilight. Waterville is all right. It is not a rumor, but a reality, that gives substantial impetus to stock values.' What do you think of that, gentlemen?" said Ballard, as he folded the letter and put it in his pocket. "Isn't that great?

"I tell you, General Ira House can come as near breakin' the shell and gettin' at the meat in the kernel as any man I ever knew. He is brainy, and no mistake. Our citizens are excited, and in their excitement they are foolish. They're attemptin' to bite the hand that is feedin' us all, and that man, J. Arthur Boast, is the worst of the lot. I would trust a stuttering sinner before I would a shamming saint. He looks as if all his days were Sundays, when, as a matter of fact, he is as full of Friday night frolics as a porcupine is of quills.

"The Town Company has made this town. I

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address my remarks to you, Mr. Rockwell. Modesty forbids, sir, that I should say to my friends, the resident director and Mr. Winthrop, that which I unhesitatingly proclaim to an outside party. Now, let me ask you, Mr. Rockwell, if I didn't tell you long ago that the members of the Waterville Town Company were the brainiest lot of men this country has ever produced?"

"I believe you made that remark."

"Yes, sir, and I'm proud to repeat the statement, and in the letter that I've just read is evidence—*prima facie* evidence—that Waterville is only restin', as it were, preparatory to enterin' a free-for-all hurdle race, and makin' the fastest time on record. Yes, sir; her time will be a record-breaker, and she will distance all would-be competitors, notwithstanding the slanderous and libelous articles now goin' the rounds of the press.

"We are now," continued Ballard, "a ways and means committee. The closing of our public school would indeed be a calamity. They asked me over at the town meetin' how much money we have in the school treasury. I told them I didn't know. I beg you gentlemen's pardon for my reply. I *do* know. There's not a dangnation cent. I was forced into the awkward position of tellin' a falsehood for the good of my adopted city of Waterville. Now, gen-

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tlement, what do you advise?" he concluded, putting his handkerchief to his cracked lip.

"I think," said McCaffrey, "that the tax payers proper are not objecting to our public school. The Waterville Town Company owns fully three-fourths of the property in Waterville. True progress pays no heed to opinion, and we want the school to go on, no matter what a few excited people say about it. The citizens who are loudest in denouncing the expense, and calling most vigorously for retrenchment, as a matter of fact, pay scarcely a penny of tax. As usual, however, those who talk loudest in a community invariably do the least."

"You're right," said Dick Ballard, glowingly. "That's the talk! There's argument in your remarks, Mr. McCaffrey, and if I had them printed on dodgers I would regard it as a personal privilege to deliver copies to the members of my state militia company, and issue a general order to have them distributed over the entire town."

"I wish to call your attention to one thing," continued Ballard. "No member of my state militia company voted to discontinue the public school; no, sir; not one."

Winthrop observed that the demonstration was a hasty action that would, probably, be disapproved of by the people themselves after more mature reflection.

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"A few weeks ago," he went on, "these same people were hurrahing for the Waterville Town Company. They expect us to perform wonders in a few weeks' time, which, in reality, will require months, and even years, to accomplish. Men may die for glory and be worshiped; for fame, and be eulogized, but when a man gives his life trying to build up the frontier, and happens to do something unpopular with the common people, he is blank, blank, blanked. I fully believe the present depression will be followed by a healthy activity, satisfying to the most pronounced pessimist in Waterville."

"Gentlemen," said Dick Ballard, "there are four of us. Miss Virginia Hilliard is a most exemplary young lady, while as a teacher she is without a peer. Her salary for the entire year is only five hundred dollars. I stand ready to pledge myself for one-fourth of this amount."

"Put me down for one-fourth," said Fred.

"I will gladly pay one-fourth," said McCaffrey, "and my check is ready at any time."

"Count me in on the deal," said Wilbur Winthrop.

"Just one thing, gentlemen," said Ballard. "I am pretty well acquainted with Miss Hilliard. She is, indeed, the daughter of her father, and she possesses his spirit of independence to a very large degree. If she knew that her compensation was comin'

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from private sources you could not get her to touch a dollar of it; therefore, I think it is best to consider this compact as strictly confidential."

Ballard's views met with the approval of all his associates. The conversation becoming general, Fred inquired when the Town Company would probably have another meeting.

"Not for some time, from present indications," replied Winthrop.

"No," said Bernard McCaffrey; "I received a letter today from Colonel Alexander, and he says it will be necessary, on account of pressing business in the Wharfage and Dockage Company down on the gulf coast to defer holding another town meeting for some months. The only thing we can do," he continued, "is to keep a good grip on our holdings here and wait. The dark days will roll by like so many clouds, and the clouds are but prophecies of tomorrow's sunshine. Waterville will be in the ascendancy. Strangers will come in, bringing money for improvements; many buildings will be erected, this great valley will be settled up with thriving farmers and successful activity, in my judgment, will take the place of the present unfortunate depression."

Fred continued his stay at Waterville for several days longer than he at first intended. His frequent consultations with Wilbur Winthrop and Bernard

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McCaffrey led him to believe they were two of the most honorable men he had ever met. Probably they were wrong in their judgment in regard to Waterville, but they were certainly sincere, and Fred felt that these two men would be true friends in any crisis.

Experience is a luxury often costing not only wealth, but reputation and peace of mind as well. Winthrop and McCaffrey seemed to be fighting for a goal against bitter odds. Many persons periodically take advantage of their friends by going through the court of memory's bankruptcy, and thus clearing the slate of all obligations, but these men never rested until the last debt of the Waterville Town Company had been paid in hard cash. They were left practically penniless, or at best, with but very little money, but happiness is a distillation of good digestion, good fellowship and a clear conscience, and they were cheerful and content to wait until time should lift them out of the trough of the sea of depression up on the waves of commercial activity.

Circumstances and conditions are sometimes grinding mills that crush the hopes upon which men set their earthly desires, filling the soul with doubt and indecision. When Fred started for Gold Valley he said he might return in a couple of weeks, and, again, he might not return for a year, or longer, for

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just now his future was one immense interrogation point, and he was seeking an answer.

The width of a sphere is as nothing when two people really love each other, but his was as yet an undeclared sentiment, and Fred, like most men, was unwilling to apply the test too severely until he knew, and was anxious to remain in Gold Valley and near Ruth.

“Trouble is to love what night is to the star,” and as soon as Fred reached the valley town in the mountains he made a hurried toilet and called upon the woman who held his heart in her keeping. He was in doubt as to whether she loved him, but rather fancied her indifferent, and like all men, because he thought she did not care whether he went away or remained, he would move heaven and earth to stay, while, perhaps, if she had shown him a decided preference—well, anyway, she welcomed him cordially and soon afterwards he was comfortably seated in the little room where he had spent so many happy evenings talking to Ruth and her father.

Mr. Hilliard was very glad to see him again, while the fire that was crackling and burning cheerily in the open grate seemed to add warmth to the genial welcome extended.

“I am delighted to see you, Mr. Rockwell, I am indeed, suh! We have at last reached the four-hundred-foot level. Temporary embarrassments will

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soon be relegated into antiquity; yes, suh, a few days longer, a few days more waitin', suh, and the struggle for a livin' will be over. No matter how much we may fight against it, suh, we are bound to be wealthy. Of course, it will take a few days yet, but only a few."

It was evident Mr. Hilliard was greatly in earnest, as was usual with him, and the four-hundred-foot level was certainly a welcome hope to Fred. He spoke briefly to Mr. Hilliard and Ruth concerning the depression at Waterville, and said he trusted that eventually—he did not pretend to say exactly when, but some time in the future—his investment in Waterville town lots would turn out all right.

"Why is it," said Fred, "we never get what we want in this world?"

"Well, you see, suh," said Mr. Hilliard, "the things we think we want are so many, and the things we really need are so few, that the supply is too great in the latter case and too impoverished in the former. Personally, suh, I'm not favorable to real estate speculations. I presume the reason is that I know so little about them, but when it comes to a mine, suh, especially like the Shonbar, I invariably know what I'm talkin' about."

"Ruth," he continued, looking at his daughter, "let us have some music. I see Mr. Rockwell is

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very tired, and we will talk no more business this evenin'."

Ruth went to the piano and sang for them. Perhaps she did not know it, but with her music she lightly and softly laid her fingers on the heart-strings of a love that was tenderly vibrating in Fred's soul, possibly forgetful of the minor chords which often rule in the chorus of destiny that women play here below.

There was a plaintive sweetness in the girl's voice that made Fred's heart beat with painful pleasure. We are told "there is a beauty that eludes the painter's brush and escapes the sculptor's chisel; we are told there is a music that cannot be written, and a love that can learn no language," but all is told in the heart-beats of a man when he truly and devotedly loves a woman.

Hope played back and forth among the chords as Ruth sang, and the music swelled and surged in sweet symphonic strains, making a blissful dream as of silken moonbeams on a summer night when the southern cross burns brightly in the purple blue of a star-gemmed sky.

While Ruth was singing, Fred felt it would be so easy to tell her of his love, for she was his ideal, the dream, the reality; with hair like spun sunbeams of the early morning, and eyes like the blue of the sky. When he thought of the world, he thought of

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Ruth, because she was his world. But, when the music ceased and the last notes of the song died away, his courage failed, yet he was conscious of his great love for this dainty, flaxen-haired, wind-kissed being who possessed a heart of fire, but with innate caution smothered it with conventionalities—perhaps too much.

Fred was a brave man in the daily walks of life, but in his affection for Ruth he was an arrant coward, for what are the heated affirmations of a man when a woman raises her disapproving eyes, filled with chilling negatives?

A beautiful woman appeals to the artistic taste of a man, a witty woman appeals to his joviality, a rich woman to his greed, and a good woman to his sincerity, but no one knows the proportions of the ingredients entering into the composite that appeals to a man's heart. We only know there is a mysterious mixture of womanhood to suit every man, and when he finally makes the discovery, then it is the woman's fault if the very keys of his soul are not taken from his keeping.

As Fred walked slowly home that evening in the dusky darkness, he said to himself, "Were I sure that I should die tomorrow, I would have told her of my love tonight, an unanalyzed love, without rhyme and without reason, without apology or appeal, without expectation or excuse. I would have

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confessed my depths of despair and the utter hopelessness of earthly happiness or success or of my soul's salvation in the world to come unless she presented my credentials." A little later he half muttered, "Guess I am a blanked fool—that's all."

CHAPTER XX

THE STAGE IS ROBBED

THE next morning Fred met his old acquaintance, Marc Casey.

"Good morning, Mr. Casey," he said cheerily.

"Hello, pardner!" was the laconic and somewhat dejected reply.

"I haven't seen you for some time," said Fred.

"No, I've been prospectin' 'round these 'ere diggin's, but I guess I won't stay much longer. The court decided against Gideon Gibbons and me. Guess I'll go back to Butte City afore long. She's the peertest minin' camp in this 'ere hull country, anyhow."

"You say the court has decided against you?" repeated Fred.

"Yes," he replied, "Gideon Gibbons and me had a law-suit against Rufus Grim over the Peacock. John Pilcher is a pretty cute lawyer, and fur a time he made it bilin' hot fur old Grim, but somehow on the show-down we got done up. It don't make much difference how cute a feller's lawyer is, when the court's prejudiced all out of shape, he ain't got no show. In a law-suit it generally depends on the

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man behind the jedge. Sometimes I think old Grim has enough sight better title to the court of this 'ere district than he has to the Peacock mine. Luck's been agin us, Gideon and me. It's been playin' football with us in these 'ere diggin's, and most of the time we've been the pig-skin."

"Your friend, Gibbons," said Fred, "told me something of this law-suit, but I rather expected that with the assistance of an attorney like John Pilcher you would succeed in establishing your claim. I am sorry if an injustice has been done you."

"It wasn't no fault of Lawyer Pilcher, I can tell you. He's a hummer, and he's a mighty social chap in the bargain; but this 'ere game isn't played to a finish yet, pardner, not by several deals of the cards.

"You see, we've appealed to the higher courts, but they're so slow that a feller had better get a hustle on hisself while he's waitin' fur a decision, or he'll starve. It don't take much to keep us from starvin', but it takes a heap to keep us from gettin' thirsty." He winked one eye as he said this, as if he had stubbed his toe against a truth.

"When old Grim," he went on, "has his neck broken, honest people may then get justice. (The man who is right may be under for awhile, but he won't stay there. Truth is a cork, it's bound to come to the top.)"

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He seemed somewhat dejected and in an ugly humor, and soon after took his leave, saying he was going to the mountains to do a little prospecting "before leavin' the diggin's."

The Peacock mine was constantly increasing its output of the yellow metal. Nearly every stage carried shipments of gold bullion to the railroad to be sent on to the mints, and Rufus Grim was constantly growing richer and more pompous, while his satellites and admirers noticeably increased after the court had decided the lawsuit in his favor.

Time works wonders. Even a junk-shop may become popular if you wait until its second-hand stock of goods becomes antiques. The junk-seller then is even more successful than the merchant—thus the stolen junk in Rufus Grim's reputation was, with his legal victory, becoming veneered with popularity.

In the meantime the pump in the Shonbar had broken down and delayed the work for several weeks. Fred was in a state of feverish anxiety and he longed to be free from the mental strain, and to know whether he was a half-owner in a gold mine that produced in paying quantities, or only a half owner in a worthless shaft. Failure may be a rich experience, but he was willing to forego further accumulations of that particular kind of assets.

Fred retired one evening at an early hour, worn out and thoroughly disheartened with his achieve-

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ments in the hills. There are natures, even enthusiastic ones, which cannot endure the blighting frost of continual disappointment. They weary in body and spirit and are for the time being pessimists, even though with rest their hearts may again be filled with the song of hope. Fred had had his Sunday dream and was awakening to a very disagreeable "blue Monday." In his present financial condition he could not tell Ruth of his life's hope. It would be unfair and cowardly, and with this thought in his mind he fell asleep.

He was startled from his slumbers about two o'clock in the morning by a noisy commotion below. Hastily dressing he went down to the barroom, where he found every one wild with excitement.

The stage-coach had been robbed and Gideon Gibbons killed, was the report. Hasty preparations were being made to form a posse and start in hot pursuit of the highwaymen. The Express Company had some heavy consignments of gold bullion sent from the mill of the Peacock mine, and it was reported missing.

Fred at once signified his willingness to join in the chase, for he did not wish to miss anything that might occur in this wonderland where love and robbers, gold-mines and town-lots seemed to be portions of his extremely varied experience.

He was furnished with a horse, and soon after

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they started pell-mell down the mountain road from Gold Valley in the direction of Waterville to the place where the robbery had occurred.

Rufus Grim offered five thousand dollars for the capture of the perpetrators of the crime, which, together with the large sum offered by the Express Company, linked with the tigerish love for hunting someone or something, stimulated a feverish interest in the breasts of these rugged men of the hills.

The sun was just coming up when they reached the spot where the robbers had sallied forth from a neighboring mountain gorge the morning before, and committed their lawless work. About two miles beyond they found the only passengers of the ill-fated stage-coach.

A gentleman and his wife, from the East, had been visiting Colonel Boast, the rancher, and were returning to their home. The man had been relieved of his wallet, containing some two thousand dollars, also his watch and diamond pin, and his wife of her jewelry. They were in a frightened and dazed condition, and were hoping to take the next stage back to Gold Valley to secure from Colonel Boast the aid which would enable them to reach their Eastern home.

They reported there were five robbers. When they had commanded Gibbons to halt, instead of obeying the order, he instantly whipped up his horses

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and had received a bullet in his body. The men quickly stopped the team, relieved the passengers of their possessions, secured the express matter, and hurriedly started for the mountain wilds, taking with them the four dappled gray horses which Gideon Gibbons had driven with so much pride.

Gibbons had sustained serious injuries and was being carefully cared for by a mountain rancher and his wife. A physician, who had been sent for to come and dress his wounds, said he would get well, as the bullet had struck a rib and glanced off.

After learning these meager details, the posse pushed on into the mountains in determined pursuit. The "mount" was under the control of the sheriff of the county, and the trail was easily followed. In the afternoon a halt was called for refreshments. The horses were tethered with lariats to some trees that grew near a mountain stream and permitted to graze while the men refreshed themselves with the cold lunch they had brought with them.

"We're twenty-four hours behind the rascals," said the sheriff, "and no one can tell whether we'll overtake them or not." Some of the men were eager to go on, and others seemed less enthusiastic than Fred had expected.

After a rest of an hour or so, the order was given to mount, and the trail was followed until darkness set in.

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Sleeping on the ground with a starry canopy for a covering, was a new experience for Fred, but he was determined to show neither fatigue nor surprise. What others had endured, he would endure, and then he was seeing one more phase of Western life.

They were up and away at dawn the next morning, and after a couple of hours of hard riding came to a precipitous mountain gorge, into which the sheriff led his command. They followed the trail to a point where it seemed impossible for a horse to ascend because of the steepness and rocky ruggedness.

The sheriff and a few of his chosen men dismounted and went on foot looking for the trail. They found the tracks of the horses, but how could the robbers have escaped from the boxlike canyon? The grass was deep and heavy in the center of the gulch, and fringed with trees and boulders on either side, affording the best of hiding places. Finally the sheriff returned, after having been gone some little time, and reported the trail lost.

"They have evidently come into this 'pocket' of a gulch to throw us off the trail. We shall have to return to the mouth of the gorge and see if it can be picked up again."

The afternoon was spent in searching for the lost trail, and night again overtook the party before their efforts had been successful. Rations were run-

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ning very low, and the evening meal was a frugal one. The men had ridden hard all day and were tired, some of them dissatisfied, and all of them more or less irritable.

After a dreary evening the party lay down to sleep. Fred made his improvised couch on some bunch grass that grew under the wide-spreading branches of a mountain pine. He could plainly hear the rippling of the stream which ran near by. The mysterious voices of the night, also the restless wanderings of unhappy spirits ladened the stillness of the darkness with their whisperings. The ghosts of forgotten things seemed to haunt the place, while the singing of the waters of the mountain brook grew louder and louder as the silence of the night advanced. The smell of the pines was a tonic to wakefulness and added to the novel and exceptionally weird surroundings.

At last, however, weariness overcame the strangeness of things, as well as the discomforts of his improvised bed, and he fell asleep. In the middle of the night something startled him with a sense of alarm, and he awoke to find everyone wrapped in slumber, save the two guards who had been left on duty a few yards from the camp. The stars were twinkling at him from the sky's inverted bowl; a wolf was howling a dismal cadence from a nearby mountainside and was answered by another far away

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in a different direction. An owl hooted its discordant notes from the dead branch of a tree a short distance away.

Life and its conventionalities seemed very trivial as he rested on his couch of grass, half thinking, half dreaming. The ignorant arrogance of men who believe all existence is revolving around their own little person "I," and that the insignificant personal pronoun is written in great golden letters all over the vast universe, was brought before him as he felt the gloomy loneliness of the night, the immeasurable distance of the stars and the vastness of things.

As he lay there with half-closed eyes he thought of the wonderful changes a few months had brought into his life. Fate was crowding his career with pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Thoughts and fancies chased each other pell-mell through his mind. His mood was as gloomy as the night, but through it, like a new star, shone a face. It was the face of Ruth, so sweet, so tender, so noble, so trusting, and wreathed with that smile he loved so well. He started, opened his eyes, murmured her name and smiled at his slavery.

The wolf howled again in the distance, and he imagined he detected a snappish twang in its concluding barks, and wondered if it foreboded danger. Occasionally one of the horses would snort, stamp

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the ground and then go on munching the mountain grass.

At last he fell into a deep, refreshing slumber, but it seemed only a moment until someone shook him by the shoulder and told him it was morning.

Springing to his feet he found there was considerable excitement among the party, for the sheriff was missing. About half an hour later he came into camp and reported he had been out looking for the trail, but could find nothing, and that they might as well return home.

While Fred did not regard the sheriff's decision as a brave one, he was not sorry, for he was hungry, tired and anxious to get back to that master of civilized man, the bath-tub. There were mutterings, however, among some of the sheriff's posse, and they whispered among themselves, as if they suspected their leader of crooked work.

It took them two days to return to Gold Valley. They found Gideon Gibbons at the hotel rapidly recovering. The robbers had all worn masks and it was impossible for him to give a description of any of them. The representative of the Express Company was evidently very much chagrined to find that the sheriff had not been able to locate the desperadoes, for twenty thousand dollars of gold bullion had been stolen, as well as other valuable express matter.

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Some two weeks later Gibbons declared that he was able to resume his place on the stage-coach, but it transpired that two of his sureties had asked to be relieved. This was an insinuation that some one regarded him as an accomplice in the unfortunate stage robbery, and upon investigation it was learned that Rufus Grim had advised his bondsmen to be careful. During the day, however, through Fred's assistance, Gibbons succeeded in giving a satisfactory bond.

That evening, a little the worse for drink, he accosted Rufus Grim at the postoffice, where the Gold Valley villagers were in the habit of congregating upon the arrival of the evening coach. Gibbons was evidently the aggressor. "Look'ee here, Mr. Grim," he said, approaching the rich operator, "you've been interferin' with me for a good many years, and it's time you're lettin' up."

"I don't know, Mr. Gibbons," said Grim, "that I have ever interfered with you. I have plenty of business of my own to look after without bothering about other people's."

"That's all right," said Gibbons, "but there's somebody likely to wish they'd never been born if they don't quit foolin' with me. You advised some of my bondsmen to take their names off my paper, but I've got other friends, and jes' as many of 'em as you have, and don't you forget it!"

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"There must be some mistake, Mr. Gibbons," said Grim coolly.

"I know," yelled Gibbons, "jes' what I'm talkin' about. You tried to imply that I was mixed up in the robbery of the stage-coach, and I say you're an unprincipled old scoundrel, and a blankety-blank, blank liar. People who go 'round accusin' other people are generally good subjects for the public to keep their eyes on. If I was as strong as I was afore bein' shot I'd maul the life out of you. You're nothin' but a four-flush. You stole the Peacock mine from Marc Casey and me, and I've my suspicions that you bought jedge and jury to beat us in our lawsuit."

One would have thought Grim would have done no less than become very angry, but instead, he tried to pacify the irate Gibbons. It seemed to anger Gibbons even more to think he could not disturb the even temper of Grim, and finally, in a burst of anger, he said: "You'd better have your life insured, old man, for somebody's goin' to be revenged, and I'll be blanked, if the day of jedgment is very fur away nuther."

At this threat Grim turned quickly and reached for his revolver. Gibbons was unarmed, and a moment later Grim mastered himself, hastily turned and walked down the street.

Marc Casey, who was seeking to quiet Gibbons,

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here took friendly charge of him, and, arm in arm, led him back to the hotel. Gibbons was hilarious, but Casey felt that in his hilarity he had been indiscreet. The next morning, however, Gibbons mounted the stage-coach on his regular run between Gold Valley and Waterville.

CHAPTER XXI

CROSS-CUTTING THE FOUR-HUNDRED-FOOT LEVEL

IN the excitement incident to Mr. Hilliard's cross-cutting towards the vein of ore in the Shonbar, the stage robbery and the enjoyable evenings spent in the society of Ruth, Fred almost forgot his hopes and fears relative to his investment in Waterville.

One morning he was out for an early walk, and upon his return came past the Hilliard home. Ruth was on the porch and he lifted his hat in a good-morning salute. She came down the path to meet him with a troubled expression on her face. It half startled him, for he feared some calamity had befallen her, and he had reached that stage where anything that hurt Ruth hurt him.

"Mr. Rockwell," she said after the morning salutation, "daddy is very despondent this morning, and greatly desires to see you, but he is so indisposed that I fear his condition will not admit of an interview before afternoon."

"What has happened?" asked Fred, in alarm. They were walking along the pathway towards the Hilliard residence as they conversed.

"So you have not heard?" asked Ruth, inquir-

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ingly, and in a tone of sadness. Fred was looking at the ringlets of her golden hair, and shook his head.

"You have not heard," she repeated, "that they have finished cross-cutting?"

"No," said Fred, deeply interested.

"Yes," repeated Ruth, in a broken voice, "they have finished the work." He led her to a seat on the broad porch where the morning sun shone full and warm, and begged her to calm herself, and tell him full particulars.

Looking at Fred through her tears, she said: "Another failure is daddy's only reward."

Fred was shocked, for this second failure meant much to him, as well as to Mr. Hilliard.

"Is it possible!" he ejaculated, "and your father was so confident only the other evening?"

"You will please not be angry with daddy?" said Ruth, laying her hand entreatingly on his arm.

"Angry!" said Fred. "No, indeed, why should I be? We were jointly interested in the results. If they are unfavorable he cannot be more disappointed than I. Had he been successful, we would have shared equally."

"It is dreadful for you, too," said Ruth, "but daddy—poor daddy—I pity him so much." She dried her tears and then went on: "Aunt Phoebe was so cross with daddy last night when she heard the result, and that made him more unhappy. Indeed,

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he did not sleep any during the night, although I tried to comfort him as well as I could."

"And you have not slept a wink?" said Fred, looking at her keenly.

"How could I when daddy was so troubled?"

For a moment Fred was silent, thinking of his shattered financial hopes, and what it meant to himself and the Hilliards. Then he continued: "I confess I was never more disappointed in my life. I was so sure your father would be successful. Mind," he said, hastily glancing at Ruth, "I attach no blame whatever to him."

"Thank you," she murmured, and Fred went on:

"No, I do not blame him; neither do I blame myself. Hundreds, yes, thousands, have pursued the same course. Some of them have been successful, and others, ourselves included, have not succeeded. I regret that your father should have spent so many years of his life in that useless prospect shaft. It is a perfect vampire that has fed upon his strength, holding out as an encouragement only false hopes."

"There is hope yet, Mr. Rockwell."

"Hope," said Fred quickly, "where?"

"The ore," she continued, "is much richer than it was at the three-hundred-foot level."

"And do you believe——" commenced Fred.

"Do not ask me, please, Mr. Rockwell, what I

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believe at this time. Mr. Grim came early this morning and left a proposition with daddy, but he has not the heart to tell you of it, and requested me to do so. You know Mr. Grim is said to be a very good business man. He has examined the ore found at the four-hundred-foot level, and says it is much richer than at the three-hundred-foot level. He offers now, if you and daddy will give him a half interest in the mine, to furnish the money to sink the shaft to the five-hundred-foot level."

"Well," said Fred, reflectively. After a few moments' thought he continued: "If Rufus Grim has confidence enough in the result to go to the five-hundred-foot level, why shouldn't your father and I do the same?"

"But, it will cost six thousand dollars, Mr. Rockwell, and neither daddy nor I could think of asking you to put any more money in the Shonbar."

"Your father should not take it so to heart. Such things will occur. Life is a risk all the way through, and if things go crooked we are not necessarily to blame."

"He does not care for himself, and neither do I care for myself, Mr. Rockwell, but we do care for you."

The blood mounted to Fred's face.

"You have been so kind to daddy and placed such unbounded confidence in his judgment, and now

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it seems as if it were impossible for him to ever repay you, unless——”

“Unless what?” asked Fred.

“Unless you will be willing to join him in giving a half interest in the Shonbar to Mr. Grim, and let him go on and develop the mine.”

“What does your father advise? What does he say?”

“He wants to go to the five-hundred-foot level, and says he will give his own half interest in the Shonbar to Mr. Grim rather than allow the work to stop at the four-hundred-foot level. Daddy believes that at the five-hundred-foot level they will strike ore as rich as any that has been discovered in the Peacock, and it looks as if Mr. Grim thought so, too, for if he did not, he would not be willing to advance the money.”

“Have you confidence in Mr. Grim?”

“We have always distrusted him,” replied Ruth, “but perhaps he is better than we think.”

“And do you believe,” said Fred, “that shipping ore will be found at the five-hundred-foot level?”

“I do not know,” she replied, “but I hope so.”

“Would it not be advisable,” urged Fred, “to give up and leave these wild mountains, and return to civilization, where your father could enjoy the remaining years of his life in peace and contentment?” His words were full of earnestness and he

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spoke with great deliberation, for this had been Fred's idea for a long time, and he was merely waiting a favorable opportunity to present it to Mr. Hilliard and Ruth.

"If such an opportunity should occur," said Ruth, reflectively, "I know daddy would refuse it, for he is very high-spirited, and, moreover, believes with all his soul that a little more work and a little more expense on the Shonbar will fulfill his fondest hopes."

Fred rose to go, but still lingered, for the beautiful woman beside him was like a balm to his disappointed hopes. It was a moment of indecision.

"You say it will require six thousand dollars?" he finally asked. "Now, if you had six thousand dollars, Miss Hilliard, and it was every dollar you possessed, what would you do with it?"

For a moment she was silent, and then replied: "I would—yes, I would sink the shaft on the Shonbar to the five-hundred-foot level." She looked at Fred and continued: "I am daddy's own daughter, and have his courage.

"Shall I tell my father," she said, as Fred started to go, "that you favor Mr. Grim's proposition?"

"No," said Fred doggedly, "I have no confidence in Rufus Grim. You may tell your father that I said not to worry. With your permission, I will

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return in a couple of hours and hope then to see him."

Ruth apparently was ignorant of Fred's passionate affection for her. Her mind and thoughts were so entirely in sympathy with her father, whom she loved so devotedly, that she had partially lost sight of every other factor in her life, for his burdens and trials were hers, and everything else was as nothing compared to her desire to comfort and console him. There was no sacrifice she would not gladly make to keep him from continuing in the shadow of sorrow.

As Fred started to go, she took his outstretched hand as if he had been her benefactor, instead of only her father's friend.

A woman may deceive a man, but she can never make a fool of him—he does that for himself. "Your judgment," said Fred, "has decided me. We will go on blasting—down, down, down through solid rock towards the unknown. How it will all end remains to be seen." Before Ruth could make a reply he had turned and was walking rapidly away towards the hotel.

CHAPTER XXII

BEGINNING ANEW

WEALTH is a gay fellow and is always happy, but others of the party are not unusually miserable, and Fred was not exactly hilarious when, in looking over his accounts, he found he had to his credit in the Chemical National Bank barely six thousand dollars. He paced the floor for a full half-hour in deep thought. "She would advance her last dollar to sink the shaft deeper," he said aloud. "She, a weak, frail, little woman, yet stronger in her affections and devotion than a regiment of soldiers. Many a rich man has paid out his last farthing for experience and then died a pauper—but, I will try once more. It may be gambling my last dollar, for this is certainly nothing more or less than a gamble, and yet—well, 'quien sabe?' We may strike it after all. A wonderful memory suggests greatness, but the greatest achievement is a conveniently poor memory in a crisis, and I will try to forget that I ever put a farthing in the Shonbar, if——"

He drew a check for the amount, making it payable to Benjamin Hilliard. He looked at it

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long and thoughtfully. "Why am I doing this?" he said to himself. "It is not for Mr. Hilliard; it is not my faith in the Shonbar. I might as well 'fess up, it is love for Ruth, bless her heart."

His hand trembled a little in signing his name to the check. It was the last throw of the dice. He felt he had in a measure given his word to Ruth. Now there was the question of his daily bread immediately ahead of him that must be considered. He would call on Mr. Hilliard and then devote all his energies to the solution of the problem, and he would solve it, too.

Strong with resolution, and with a judgment sadly warped, perhaps, because of his infatuation for Ruth, he returned to the Hilliard home. Ruth met him at the door and together they went into the little parlor where a wood fire was burning brightly.

"I delivered your message to daddy," she said, "and almost immediately he fell into a restful sleep."

"Do not disturb him," said Fred, "but when he awakens, kindly give him this envelope; in it is a check for six thousand dollars. Tell him to start tomorrow for the five-hundred-foot level."

The impulsive Ruth took the envelope with hands that trembled, while two great tears dimmed her eyes. "Why have you done this?" she asked.

The object of an ardent love approaches a per-

fection as love ripens into completeness, and the longer a man is constant in love, the nobler he, himself, becomes. Fred would probably have answered her question then and there, had he not felt that, in a way, she was conscious of an obligation, and he spurned even the thought of telling her his love at such a time.

Mr. Hilliard appeared at the door. "Mr. Rockwell," he said, "your presence in my house brings sunshine with it. You know the worst. Ruth tells me she has informed you of the unfortunate low-grade ore found at the four-hundred-foot level of the Shonbar, but there is encouragement in the improved geological formation as well as the increased values."

Ruth turned from Fred to her father while he was speaking and buried her face on his shoulder, crying with soft little sobs that nearly broke Fred's heart.

"Daughter, why are you cryin'? If I were givin' you advice I would tell you never to shed tears in a man's presence. They have so blinded the eyes of many a little woman that whole battalions of choice opportunities have slipped by unobserved. Here, daughter, what's the matter?"

Ruth did not answer, but handed him the envelope. He opened it and carefully scanned the check. The old man's eyes were full of surprised

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gratitude as he looked at Fred. One arm was around his daughter, but the other he extended to Fred, as he said:

“Suh, you overpower me with your trust. I have been workin’ away so long on the Shonbar that I can’t blame my friends if they lose heart. But, suh, something that no mortal man has knowledge of keeps tellin’ me that my efforts will be successful. You honor me by sharin’ my hope in the outcome of the Shonbar, you do, indeed, suh! There’s good blood, Mr. Rockwell, cou’sin’ through your veins, and there’s a crown waitin’ for you when we have once reached the five-hundred-foot level; yes, suh!

“I may never have mentioned it to you before, suh, but once I told your father that if he would stay by the Shonbar it would make him a millionaire. I have forgotten whether I ever made this observation to you or not, but I wish to assure you at this time, Mr. Rockwell, in the presence of Ruth, that your confidence in the Shonbar is well founded, and it will make you richer than all the other possessions left you by your father; yes, suh, much richer.”

Ruth dried her tears and was in a little while as cheerful as a mountain thrush that had never known a sorrow, and her laughing countenance, with lashes still wet with tears, was a rainbow of

hope. The old miner declared that he never felt better in his life, and that work on the Shonbar should again be commenced early the following morning.

Money is frequently the key that unloads reserve, clears the domestic atmosphere of misunderstanding, changes reticence into enthusiasm and causes landscape and sky to glow with the brilliancy of molten gold. It lightens labor, and surcharges the home with the perfume of hope.

On his way to the hotel, Fred called at the office of the Gold Valley *Prospector*.

"Where is your typo?" he asked in the course of his conversation with the editor.

"Haven't got any," replied the proprietor; "he left on this morning's stage. We'll not be able to get out an issue of the paper this week unless we find someone who can set type. Say, why can't I sell my printing office to you?"

"I'm not able to buy it," replied Fred.

"Well, I'll lease it to you."

"On what terms?" asked Fred.

"I'll lease it to you for one year for one-half its earnings," replied the good-natured editor, who was never known to have enough energy to walk across the street to solicit an advertisement.

"What will it earn in a year?"

"Oh, twelve or fifteen hundred dollars—sub-

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scriptions and advertisements. I own the building. I call this the reception and editorial-room, the other is the composing-room, while the one still farther back is where the printer usually sleeps."

In Fred's college days he had been one of a trio who had edited a college paper, set their own type, made up their forms, and circulated the issue after night, contenting themselves for a compensation with the general wonderment of their fellow students as to who were the publishers. He felt he was capable of acting as a type-setter, as well as writing editorials of the *Gold Valley Prospector*. He examined the room designated as the living room of the printer, and found it comfortable, with an open fireplace or grate, but otherwise very plain.

The printing of the paper was done on an old-fashioned hand press, which would require the assistance of a boy for a couple of hours once a week. Aside from this Fred believed he was capable of handling all of the details of the work connected with the issuing of the paper. He told the proprietor he would accept his offer, and before he retired that night all arrangements had been made, the lease drawn and signed, and Fred commenced operations the next morning as proprietor of the *Gold Valley Prospector*.

He moved his trunk and personal effects into the shabby back room, to be used in the future as

B E G I N N I N G A N E W

his sleeping apartment. After settling his hotel bill, he found he had but three dollars in his pocket upon which to begin the struggle for bread.

It was a new experience, but had the novelty of excitement.

After arranging his room he began setting type, and smiled to himself as he thought of the change from the New York *Banner* to the *Prospector*. Yes, he had made many sacrifices, and would he not willingly make many more for the sake of being near the one woman he loved, "with a love that surpasseth understanding."

CHAPTER XXIII

VOCAL MUSIC

AT first sixteen hours a day was Fred's experience on the *Prospector*. All day and far into the night he set type and made up forms until the paper was finally ready to be brought out. It contained the proprietor's retiring bow to the public and Fred's introductory announcement.

As soon as he could spare the time he called at the Hilliards'. Ruth greeted him more kindly than ever, yet with a certain reserve that was in a way mystifying, and Mr. Hilliard, after assuring him that excellent progress was being made on the *Shonbar*, turned the conversation to the new venture Fred had taken.

"Very creditable, suh, very creditable, indeed," said he, glancing at the copy of the *Prospector* which he had been reading. "Ruth and I think you have made an excellent beginnin', suh, very excellent."

"Indeed we do," said Ruth. "We have often heard, though, that editors were quite an exclusive sort, and we did not know but that was the reason you have not called upon us for so long."

"Well, that is the reason," responded Fred,

jestingly. "As managing editor of the *Prospector*, I have been exclusively engaged in setting type, soliciting advertisements, making up forms, and so forth."

They laughed at Fred's remark, as well as his rueful countenance, and praised him for his ability to impersonate all the functionaries of a printing-establishment. In the midst of their conversation Aunt Phoebe appeared at the door of the parlor, and bowing to Fred, said, "Good evenin', Mr. Rockwell. I have been wantin' to see you for some time, suh."

Fred rose and returned the salutation. As he sat down he noticed Mr. Hilliard appeared decidedly uncomfortable, as if fearing a disturbance in the domestic atmosphere.

"Mr. Rockwell," continued Aunt Phoebe, "I consider it my duty to inform you that you, are makin' as great a mistake as my brother."

"Come, sister," said Mr. Hilliard, "come, come!"

"Benjamin," said Aunt Phoebe, looking hard at him over her spectacles, "I shall say what I have to say. I think it is a duty that I owe Mr. Rockwell, to tell him that I believe he is squanderin' his money. There is not a chance in ten thousand, no, suh, not one, for you ever to get back a penny of your money, that you have given my brother. Be-

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sides, you are only encouragin' Benjamin to fool his time away. I have nearly worn my life out takin' care of him and the girls, Virginia and Ruth! I must admit, Virginia has a good deal of sense—a heap more, I am proud to say, than either Benjamin or Ruth."

"I hope, Mr. Rockwell," interrupted Mr. Hilliard, "that you'll remember an observation I made to you, some time ago, in regard to my good sister——"

"What have you been sayin' about me, Benjamin?" asked Aunt Phoebe, as she looked sharply at her brother. Mr. Hilliard paid no attention to his sister's question, and went on:

"You'll remember, I observed at one time, suh, that my sister was a most extraordinary woman; yes, suh, most extraordinary. She is possessed of a remarkable intellect. There is, however, a slight difference in regard to our judgment in relation to the Shonbar. She is very set in her ways, very, indeed, suh! I am sorry to say she does not share in our belief relative to the final outcome of our minin' property."

"Benjamin," said Aunt Phoebe, still looking at him over her spectacles, "it is not a *slight* difference of opinion, but a very *wide* one, indeed. If you had a hundred thousand dollars today, you'd be stakin' out all the mines in the mountains around

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Gold Valley, you know you would. There are times, Mr. Rockwell, when it is necessary for me to put my foot down, and I am not goin' to neglect my duty any longer. You must know the true situation, and if you have no more sense than to go on givin' your money to Benjamin to dig a worthless hole in the mountain-side, why I'll wash my hands of the affair, and have the consolation of knowin' that I told you beforehand what you might expect."

Fred would have been amused had he not observed the pained expression on Ruth's face, and the discomfiture of Mr. Hilliard. In reality, it was an opportune time for him to make a suggestion which he had long wished to make to Mr. Hilliard.

"I am highly honored, Miss Hilliard, that you are interested enough in my welfare to give me so kindly this advice. Your brother has been very enthusiastic in regard to the Shonbar."

"Don't I know that?" interrupted Aunt Phoebe. "And haven't I told you again and again that he was wastin' his time and money and misleadin' you?"

"Well," continued Fred, "I will not go quite so far as to say that, but I will say this; that it would please me very much to have the assurance of Mr. Hilliard, that if when the five-hundred-foot level is reached in the Shonbar, and he fails to find

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the wealth he has been so earnestly looking for, that he will abandon the Shonbar and accept certain offers of a pecuniary nature in the East which I have in mind."

"If I knew," replied Aunt Phoebe, "that there was to be a finish to this thing, I'd have more patience, but my brother no sooner gets to one level, than he wants to push on to the next hundred-foot level, and there's no end to it. Why, if Benjamin had his way, and his life was spared long enough, I believe he'd have a hole clear through the earth."

Mr. Hilliard was noticeably disturbed. He had risen and was walking back and forth across the floor in a nervous, yet dignified manner.

"Your request, Mr. Rockwell," he finally said, "shall be complied with, and in complyin' with it, I hope I shall also pacify my sister. I give you my word of honor, suh, that when the five-hundred-foot level is reached and we have cross-cut into the vein of wealth that I feel positive, suh, yes, positive, is waitin' to be brought to the light of day—if, I say, we should again be disappointed, then I am ready to give up my labors in the Shonbar; yes, suh, give up my life's work. Of course, you cannot understand, and perhaps never will, the magnitude of this promise. This is my home, and I should have to give up all that I hold most sacred. Here is the scene of my struggles and trials; every rock, suh,

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every tree and stone of this here place, suh, is precious in my sight. 'Home,' what sublimity is in that word. Destroy it, and locality, country and the world become a void and without form. Home is a sacred place, suh; home is where loved ones gather around the hearthstone, where Christian graces abound, where the hand-maidens of happiness, love and sympathy, are ever present. It is the Holy of Holies, suh, and a sanctuary where man is safe from the world's temptations, perils and alarms—a place where character is moulded, and where spiritual graces are developed. 'Home, be it ever so humble,' is the anchor of good citizenship and national life. It is the strength of our beloved country, the bulwark of our institutions, and the pride of our civilization." There were tears in Mr. Hilliard's voice as well as in his eyes when he ceased speaking.

"Well," said Fred, "I believe in the loyal life, the earnest life, the simple life—and those who would rather go down to defeat with their loved ones than to victory and wealth with strangers; but your struggles have been long and hard; you have endured one disappointment after another, your dreams have been, to some extent at least, shattered by failure, and the remainder of your life should be spent in quiet and ease, not only for your own sake, but for the good and comfort of others."

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The old miner made one final struggle with the vision he had been worshipping for years. "Yes, I promise—if we fail at the five-hundred-foot level."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Aunt Phoebe, as she raised her hands in an attitude of supplication and thanksgiving. "I feel now that there's goin' to be an end to this tomfoolery, and I'll not say another word, not a single word, until the five-hundred-foot level is reached." She turned to Fred, who had risen as she started to retire from the room, and bade him good-evening, telling him that, in her opinion, he had accomplished a great deal of good.

As soon as the door closed behind her Fred turned to Mr. Hilliard and begged him not to take the slightest notice of what his sister had said. He understood her good qualities and overlooked her peculiarities. There is a force in severe criticism. It acts like a punching bag—gaining strength by constantly resisting.

Fred also thanked Mr. Hilliard for his promise, and before the evening was over the old gentleman became almost like his former optimistic self, narrating to Fred with a fair degree of enthusiasm how well the pumps and other machinery at the mines were working.

Ruth sang for them and Fred completely forgot the lateness of the hour, so well was he enter-

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tained. It was a wonderful song she sang, an intoxicating sort of music that strangely stirred him with its invisible power. And the singer—how could Fred describe her? A sweet-throated woman whose spiritual and physical natures seemed merged by the sacrifice of self—one who had assimilated sincerity and conscience, kindness and obedience, truth and justice, into a new and wonderful being. Trustful eyes of blue and hair of tangled threads of gold, all blown about a chiseled brow that indicated a noble soul, as well as richest intellect. This was Ruth in the morning of her womanhood.

Fred was a fatalist in this: he believed that "Whatever is to be will be," and if ever the time came for him to tell her of his great affection he would have the courage to do so. At present he was enjoying to the utmost the pleasure of an unspoken homage, and contented himself alone with the loving. His admiration for her was certainly ennobling.

Her singing had silenced him—he wished to be alone, and soon after took his departure, wending his way to the little back room of the printing office.

When he awoke the next morning he found an exceedingly heavy snow had fallen. Nothing like it had occurred in Gold Valley for many years, and many of the mines necessarily closed down on account of the scarcity of fuel to operate the en-

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gines. During the next four weeks the snow kept falling in greater and greater quantities, and in a measure Gold Valley was cut off from the outside world.

Fred applied himself strenuously to his work, increasing his acquaintanceship with the people, soliciting advertisements, and succeeding far beyond his expectations in making the paper a success. His friends said many pleasant things about the attractive appearance of the *Prospector*. It was filled with good, readable matter, and its circulation was constantly increasing.

Another heavy snow storm during the holidays rendered the roads almost impassable, and finally the work on the Shonbar was of necessity suspended, nor was it resumed until late the following Spring.

One dismal night when the snow was falling and the wind howling, Fred fell into a meditative mood, thinking of old New York days, of the clubs and theatres, and his friends in the *Banner* office, of how all these attractions were now as nothing to him, compared to a little mountain maid with fluffy, wind-blown hair of gold and eyes of blue.

There was a song of gladness in his heart, although the tempest was wailing a mournful chant without; a refrain of the song she had sung to him

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that day so long ago, and acting on the impulse of the moment, he wrote these lines:

My Dear Ruth:—

I scarcely know why I write you, but sitting here in the back room of my little printing-office, with the winter winds tugging at the warped weatherboarding of this frail building, and the snow drifting deep and white without, I feel like again telling you of the pleasure you gave me when singing the song of marble columns, blooming roses, in a Spanish garden, and pearls hidden in the heart of the deep. I do not remember the words, but both the sentiment and the harmony have found lodgment in my heart.

To me, vocal music is the melody of the gods, it is an ethereal mist, a soft and dainty distillation of a thousand aromatic perfumes, as inspiring and wholesome to the soul as dew is to buds and blossoms; a measureless, joyous delight like distant purling of rippling waters appealing to the affections with a tuneful voice of dreamy sweetness that seems to quiver on the boundary—the dividing line of reason and romance, of intelligence and inspiration, plaintively pleading in its rhythmic pulsing and purity to wayward and hungering humanity, begging it to come higher into regions of loftiest love.

Oh wondrous power that can thus speak to the soul! Thine is the nearest approach to the breath of Omnipotence as it is wafted to us on the drowsy and fragrant night-winds of peace from the whispering-gallery of heaven itself.

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A singer's lifework is a flowing brook of gladness, a glint of warmest sunshine, the sweet voice of conscience and conviction, of forgiveness and friendship, blending soul with soul, and attuning life and love, song and sighs, laughter and logic, tears and triumphs to the harmony of the unchanging and unchangeable laws of the infinite.

If there is aught in this tribute to vocal music which pleases you, kindly accept the responsibility, for you, and you alone, are the inspiration.

Faithfully, your friend,

FRED ROCKWELL.

He read this letter through carefully and then re-read it, after which he roughly crumpled the paper in his hand, and raised his arm as if to throw it among the burning faggots in the grate. For a moment he hesitated, then placed it on the table before him, smoothed out the wrinkled sheets with greatest care, and laid it among some private papers, saying, "She shall never see these lines; she shall never know what an idiot this maddening love is making of me.

"What I need," he continued, talking to himself, "is sense, just common sense. Why should I permit this girl to dethrone my reason? A woman in the beginning may inspire a man to great deeds, and eventually, after the battle of life has been won, round out his career with a merited reward, but never can she work out his destiny—he must

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do that for himself." He walked back and forth in his room, vigorously smoking his "brier". He remembered Ruth had seemed preoccupied at their last meeting—she had not urged him to call as enthusiastically, he fancied, as in former days.

He thought over the situation. "Fred Rockwell," he ejaculated, "you are a fool. Wake up. Go back to Gotham. Wed your ambition as you originally intended; forget love's will-o'-the-wisp, and profit by your experience. You have been slighted, neglected, and at this very moment the little woman you believe you idolize regards you with less favor than before you gave up your Eastern opportunities—your place in the world's activities—that you might be near her."

Then he remembered a friend he once knew, a good sort of a chap, who had grown gray laboring for others, but one sad day he fell desperately in love with a woman. This woman, after she found his love was securely hers, neglected him. At first he did not understand, but later his intuition enabled him to discover the truth. He was a proud man of the world and had grown strong by experience and suffering. His pleasure consisted chiefly in helping to make this woman of his choice happy, but his pride was mighty and protected even him from the allurements of a great love that had drifted into his heart on a perfumed South wind.

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She was a generously noble girl, who made but one error—it was this: she believed she could treat him with the indifference of neglect without his uttering resentment, and she could, for he said no word. But, while she was doing this thing, possibly permissible, he weighed anchor, kept a fast hold on his pride, and sailed far away into a sea of silence.

Fred was thinking of all this and condemned himself, and yet, something kept whispering to him of hope.

What is hope, anyway, but a composite of desire and expectation that always has its face turned towards the future, and, like life itself, is the result of confidence, starting from an intangible point of departure and ever tending towards some unknown point of arrival, always believing that the balm of Gilead will finally be ours, even though it comes to us from the bottom of Pandora's box.

CHAPTER XXIV

STARTING THE BOOM

IN the meantime matters were progressing slowly in the great Thief River Valley. There had been no meeting of the Waterville Town Company. Wilbur Winthrop and Bernard McCaffrey regularly opened the Town Company's office every morning and closed it every evening, but time hung heavily on their hands. Thus passed away the winter months in weary waiting for renewed activity in real estate that seemed stubborn in its lethargy.

Even Dick Ballard was becoming restless, and made many trips between the hotel and the brewery. His interest in the state militia company seemed unabated, however, and his sore lip was still unhealed. When the patronage of the hotel was poor, Mrs. Ballard, the shrew, had the habit of holding Dick responsible. At such times the long-suffering Dick would tip-toe from the hotel, either from the back or the front door, as opportunity offered, and head for the brewery, where he would attempt to drown his sorrow.

One day Dick was in the hotel office. He had just terminated a stormy interview with Mrs. Bal-

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lard. It all came about by reason of her reminding the landlord of the Ballard House that she had had several chances to marry before she had ever seen him. Whereupon Dick had replied, while putting his hand protectingly to his lip, that such neglect of opportunity was something he simply never could forgive. He pinched himself as he said this, feeling he had scored, and mentally promised himself a drink as a reward of merit before he was many minutes older. A little later she went upstairs, yet she was attempting to engage in conversation with him, and her lusty voice fairly shook the building.

Ballard was thirsty. He again put his hand protectingly to his cracked lip, winked at himself as he passed the broken mirror that hung like a sounding-board of vision on the wall, went softly out of the front door and headed down the street, leaving Mrs. Ballard still conversing in her sonorous fog-horn voice.

In a few minutes she had a sort of an intuition that Dick, her recreant husband, had left the hotel. Rushing to an upstairs window and opening it wide she looked far down the street. Sure enough, there was Dick almost a block away. She immediately set up a commotion that startled the people for blocks, yelling in the twang of her highly pitched voice, denouncing him as a worthless helpmate.

In the meantime Dick pushed silently along,

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never turning his head to the right nor to the left, until he came to an alley. Into this he ducked with alacrity and did not lessen his haste until he reached the brewery.

While comfortably enjoying his first glass of beer he was surprised by the man-of-all-work about the hotel touching him on the shoulder, and looking up saw him shaking like a leaf—he was out of breath and white as a ghost.

“Oh, Mr. Ballard,” he said, in an agitated voice between his gasps for breath, “come home, come home quick; Mrs. Ballard has fallen out of an upstairs window and broke her neck.”

“Hold on there,” said Dick, as he unconsciously put up his protecting left hand, “don’t you make me laugh, or you’ll have my lip bleedin’ here in a minute.”

Arriving at the hotel he found everything in confusion. Already the three physicians of the town were on the scene. Mrs. Ballard had been hastily carried into the parlor of the hotel and made as comfortable as possible on a big lounge. Her head was awry on her shoulders as if it had received a twist. Her neck had either been broken or dis-jointed by the fall. The three country doctors were making a hurried examination. They retired for a consultation, and Dick approached his wife. While

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not unconscious, she was very much subdued, and with a voice that was pathetically low, she said :

“ Dick, this is all your fault, all your fault. Oh, why haven’t you been a better husband to me? ”

“ Well, I’ll have to admit that I was to blame in this instance, anyway,” replied Dick. “ I’m mighty sorry for you, wife, but don’t be cast down. We’ll pull things in shape pretty soon and everything will be a-hummin’.”

Just here the physicians returned, and the spokesman, with a long, solemn face, announced that Mrs. Ballard would die. She might live, he said, two hours, but it was hardly possible, as her neck was broken.

Tears came into her eyes as she heard the verdict of the physicians, and Dick raised his hand to his cracked lip. Wife and husband looked at each other—rather Dick looked, and Mrs. Ballard glared, but no word was spoken.

Closing her eyes as if at last admitting defeat, she said: “ Dick, I have one word to say to you. You know you haven’t spoken to my mother for fifteen years. Oh, Dick, why have you been so stubborn? She’s a good woman, even if she is my mother. I want you to promise me that you’ll be kind to her when I am gone, and tomorrow or next day, or whenever the funeral takes place, please ride with her to my grave, won’t you, Dick? ”

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"Now, look'ee here, wife," said Dick, with an agonized expression, "don't you ask me to do anything of the kind. I don't like your mother, and you know I don't. I will do anything else on earth that you request, but I won't ride behind your dead body with your mother; no, sir! I'll see that everything is done in honor of the occasion, and I'll have my state militia march from the hotel to the cemetery, as an escort, but I won't ride with your mother!"

"Oh, Dick," said his wife, almost overwhelmed with hysterical sobs, "it is my only—my last—my dying request that you will show enough respect for my mother and my memory to take her in the carriage with you at my funeral."

Dick thought a moment. After all, it was not an unreasonable request, and, then, it was the last concession, probably, she would ever ask.

Here an unusual thing happened, tears actually came to his eyes, and reaching over he took her hand, saying gently: "Wife, I'll ride with your mother; I will do it, but I want to tell you right here and now, it'll spoil the entire day for me!"

"Spoil the entire day for you!" shouted his wife, with almost her old-time vigor. In desperation, and with almost superhuman effort she raised up on the lounge as she reached menacingly towards Dick. Dick dodged, and in the struggle the dis-

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jointed member of her vertebrae sprung back in place and—she didn't die. Half an hour afterwards she was going about the house as usual.

One day, soon after this, Dick called at the Town Company's office and gently suggested that as his finances were running rather low, he would like to have a check for Wilbur Winthrop's board, if convenient.

Wilbur was a proud fellow, and disliked to admit that he was, in the ordinary parlance of the day, "broke." He therefore suggested to Ballard the advisability of purchasing a few lots in the Eagle addition to the city of Waterville. "Or," continued Winthrop, "we can let you have a couple of lots adjoining your hotel. You've been a good friend of ours, and we would let you have them cheap, awfully cheap."

Dick sat back in his chair, inserted one of his thumbs in the armhole of his vest, and holding the other hand to his injured lip, said: "Now, look'ee here, Winthrop, I've been your friend, haven't I?" Winthrop acknowledged that he had.

"I've been your friend, Mr. McCaffrey, haven't I?" said Ballard, pointing his finger straight at the resident director.

"I think you have," replied that gentleman, laughing.

"Yes, I've been Colonel Alexander's friend; I've

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been General Ira House's friend, and Tom Lee's friend. I've been John Pilcher's friend; in fact, gentlemen, I've been the friend of the Waterville Town Company from start to finish." He brought his hand down on the table in front of him as he made this remark, forgetting in his vehemence even his cracked lip.

"Yes, sir," he went on, "I've been a friend to you and to your enterprise, but when it comes, Wilbur Winthrop, to selling your uncle any town lots in Waterville, why, you don't know me. Oh, no; Dick Ballard usually knows which side his bread's buttered on, and between ourselves, I wouldn't give you a square meal of victuals for any blankety-blank lot you've got in Eagle's addition. No, sir; Mr. Winthrop, money is what I want, and pardon me for observin' it, money is what I, politely, but nevertheless firmly, insist that you must produce—if not to-day, perhaps tomorrow, to liquidate that little matter of board that has been running some three months."

He walked over to the window and looked wistfully out upon the sage-brush landscape. "The grass is beginnin' to grow," he said, "and I see it is startin' in the streets as well as on the beautiful lots you have for sale. By the way," said Dick, "where does this lead to?" kicking his foot against a door in the rear of the real estate office.

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"Into the drafting room," replied Winthrop.

"Into the 'grafting room,' did you say?" asked Ballard, looking innocently at Wilbur.

"No," said Winthrop, coloring; "drafting room, where we make maps of the different additions to Waterville."

"Oh!" said Dick, in all seriousness, "I thought you said 'grafting room.'"

"Barney" McCaffrey was holding his sides in smothered laughter, while Winthrop's face was red with indignant anger.

Presently Ballard continued, as he turned and expectorated a generous amount of tobacco juice at the stove: "What I've said to you never has and never will escape the lips of Dick Ballard. No, sir; I'm your friend, but don't try to work me with any town lots payin' board bills."

Winthrop was decidedly nonplussed. McCaffrey was laughing contentedly and quietly to himself at Winthrop's discomfiture. Ballard looked on and chuckled, as much as to say, "I'm a heap smarter than you fellers give me credit for being." He finally broke the silence by suddenly asking: "Mr. Winthrop, what is your lot next to the hotel worth?"

"Five hundred dollars," replied Winthrop, looking up.

"I hope you'll get it," said Ballard. "Yes, I hope you'll sell it for a thousand, but I'll tell you

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something," he said, shutting one eye and looking hard at Winthrop with the other, "I wouldn't trade you our militia company's new snare drum for both of them blanked lots; no, sir! I'd rather be a drummer boy in our militia company than be the entire Waterville Town Company." As he turned laughingly towards the door he came face to face with Miss Virginia Hilliard.

She looked as fresh as a prairie flower—a white flower with a dash of color in it. Ballard lifted his hat and bowed low, for he not only liked the young lady, but she was one of his boarders who paid promptly.

Virginia and Ruth Hilliard were decidedly different, yet there was a strong resemblance in character. Both wore becomingly the garment of modesty. It was a part of them. One appreciated, it for its concealment, the other for its protection—it was their different points of view.

After speaking pleasantly to McCaffrey and Winthrop, Virginia turned to Ballard and said: "I'm very glad you are here, Mr. Ballard. I want to ask your advice." Dick was all attention, for if there was one thing he liked to do better than another—barring a drill exercise with his beloved state militia—it was to give advice, especially to a pretty woman. Wilbur Winthrop pushed forward the best

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chair in the office and invited Miss Hilliard to be seated.

"Thank you," she said, smiling kindly at Wilbur, who looked as delighted as he felt. "I wish to talk to you about an investment in Waterville."

"What kind of an investment?" asked Dick.

"In regard to making a purchase of town lots."

Ballard coughed immoderately, cleared his throat, "a-hemmed" several times, got red in the face, looked helplessly at McCaffrey, put his handkerchief up to his lip, and finally said: "Nothin' like it in the world, Miss Hilliard; best investment on earth. There's not another place in the United States that will come out of the kinks like Waterville. No, sir; if I had a million I'd plant every dollar of it in Waterville; yes, sir; every dollar.

"My land!" he said, glancing at his watch, "it is three o'clock. I must be goin'." With this he took up his hat, bowed awkwardly and left the room hurriedly.

"Is this a map of the town?" asked Miss Hilliard, rising and approaching a map that hung on the wall near where Bernard McCaffrey was seated.

"Yes, that is one of the best maps that has ever been gotten out," said McCaffrey, adjusting his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"And where is Eagle's addition?"

McCaffrey pointed it out.

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"And at what price are you selling lots in that part of the town?"

"Well, really, Miss Hilliard," replied McCafrey, stammering a little, "we haven't been selling very many lots—that is, not recently. I will refer you to Mr. Winthrop; he has charge of all such matters and perhaps he can give you better advice than I can."

"But, what do you advise in regard to investments in Waterville?" she asked abruptly, with a slightly ironical expression on her inquiring face.

"Well, you know we believe in Waterville, Miss Hilliard; we believe it is destined to be one of the great Western cities in the United States. Of course, there has not been any marked activity during the past winter, but we are expecting business to open up, well, 'most any time now."

Virginia turned to Winthrop and seated herself beside the desk, asking him to point out what he regarded as one of the most desirable corners in Eagle's addition.

Usually Winthrop prided himself upon his ability to sell lots, and he was quite willing to sell to anyone excepting this little creature of hope, faith and confidence. He may have been the salt of the Town Company, but he could not live on salt alone, and although he had been so hard pressed for ready money during the winter and spring, that he had

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shut himself out, so to speak, from all local society entertainments, he completely lost his nerve when he looked down into Virginia's eyes, which looked like "brown pansies drenched with dew"—dangerous eyes for a lover to look into.

After studying the map for some time, Wilbur put his pencil down at one point, and said reluctantly: "I consider these lots as desirable as any in Eagle's addition."

"And for what are you selling them?"

"We are asking a hundred dollars a lot, but we are not selling any just now, Miss Hilliard."

She looked at the map for a few moments and then said: "You think these are the best lots in the addition, do you?"

"Well—no—hardly, Miss Hilliard; the fact is," he faltered, "we do not care to make any sales at the present time. We are rather expecting some additional information later. We—we expect to hold a Town Company meeting and may conclude to reduce the price of lots, and——"

"Or, you may raise the prices," she retorted, quickly, looking at Wilbur in a business sort of way. "Is it not so?"

"P—possibly," replied Winthrop.

"Well, I wish to purchase four lots on the corner you have indicated. Here is the money," she said, laying down a roll of bills on his desk. "Please

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fix up the deed and leave it for me at the hotel as soon as convenient."

"But—hold on," said Winthrop. She had risen and started towards the door. "You do not mean to make a purchase of lots? Really, you must not. I have not advised it. You had better reconsider—think it over for a few days." All this was stammered out by Winthrop in a hurried and confused manner, while he pushed the money towards her.

You may command a man, but you cannot command any woman who is worth while. You may think you are persuading her, but in the end she will have her own way.

"But I have considered," said Miss Hilliard, in a voice that was not harsh, but was startlingly determined, like the unexpected cracking of ice on a mill-pond, all the while smiling in her imperious way. "I have fully considered, Mr. Winthrop, and desire to make the purchase. Good evening, gentlemen." And she was gone.

"Barney," as his intimate friends called him, sat looking over his spectacles, while an amused smile played over his ten-thousand-dollar face.

"Women are queer," he said. "They always find a soldier of fortune fascinating, especially if he has brown hair, and eyes that talk, is handsome and romantic looking, and goes about like an interesting untold story."

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Winthrop looked at the roll of bills on his desk for a few moments in silence, and then turning to McCaffrey, said: "Thank heaven, old partner, the boom has started!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE THREE PATHS

RUFUS GRIM was not pleased with Fred Rockwell's policy of conducting the *Gold Valley Prospector*. A number of items had appeared in the columns of that paper which tended to vindicate Gideon Gibbons from all suspicion of any connection with the stage-coach robbery, and Grim considered this an indirect thrust at himself. His money had made him a lion among the people of Gold Valley, but for some unaccountable reason he had been unable to secure the good opinion of Fred Rockwell.

The ambition of this self-made plutocrat was to represent the people of Idaho in Congress, and he felt it would never do to permit his own town paper to be prejudiced against him. Several times he had made overtures to Fred of a friendly nature, but had been invariably repulsed. On one occasion he had endeavored to curry favor with Fred, and told him patronizingly in his uncouth, pompous way, that he was very glad that such a scholarly gentleman had charge of the *Prospector* of Gold Valley.

But Fred was so unapproachable that it was quite plain, even to Grim, with his intense egotism, that

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he could not win over this very self-contained young fellow who carried so pronounced a look of rugged honesty in his face. The rich miner was irritated at his own lack of words when in Fred's presence. With others he was as boastful as ever—bragged of his gold, and in his domineering way tried to subdue everything with which he came in contact. Those who knew his home life best said he was afraid of his wife. She was all the code of formality suggested, and Grim, in his way, honored her, while at the same time he feared her. It was whispered that he found more pleasure in his step-daughter's society than in that of his wife.

Helen, with her handsome face, appealing voice and lisping speech was too shrewd a woman not to humor her mother's whims of formality and to flatter the coarse vanity of her step-father, upon whose bounty she was dependent. She was an artful little woman, full of strategy and deceit, and hopelessly untruthful, but successfully hiding her artfulness under a soft, cooing voice, the most innocent of expressions and the sweetest of manners.

She was incapable of sincerely loving any one excepting herself, but the admiration and adoration of men were as the breath of life to her. She did not love Fred Rockwell, but she exerted all her charms to make him love her, and she hated Ruth right cordially because Ruth won without trying,

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while she tried without winning. Outwardly she courted Ruth, and never missed an opportunity of calling her "dear" and "darling" and of telling her how pretty she was.

Rufus Grim despised Arthur Boast with a hatred worthy of a better cause; hated him as a strong, persistent man hates a vacillating, weak one, and because he feared Helen Goodwin might become overfond of him.

Helen was far too clever to permit Grim to know of her affair with Arthur, and so successfully did she manage that while constantly meeting Arthur clandestinely, she flattered Grim into believing her the sweetest, truest and best of women. His wife he respected, but Helen he secretly loved with every beat of his heart, and if there is any good in a man or woman, it develops when the cockles of the heart are warmed with honest affection.

In the early days of June, J. Arthur Boast returned permanently to Gold Valley, and at first paid a great deal of attention to Ruth, not as a lover, but rather as a friend of the family, and by every artifice known to his cunning, endeavored to enlist her condolence, knowing that nothing so quickly gains a woman's interest as an appeal to her sympathies. He constantly assumed the attitude that no one was his friend, no one understood the depths of his na-

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ture, and it pleased him to hear Ruth say that she appreciated him and was sure she always would.

He said nothing directly derogatory of Fred's character, but never lost an opportunity to depreciate him, as if by so doing he could raise higher his own puny standard in her estimation.

Fred did not understand why Boast left Water-ville, especially as it was rumored that a great boom had again been launched in that place, but not long after Boast's return he received a note from him, requesting Fred to call at the hotel that evening. Boast said he was slightly indisposed and could not leave his room, otherwise he would call at the printing-office.

It was after eight o'clock that night when Fred rather reluctantly called at the hotel, and at once went to Boast's room. He found him resting on a lounge, but as painstakingly dressed as ever. He seemed weak and very pale and no longer spoke in his usual thin, piping voice, but in a quiet, subdued manner that at once interested Fred.

"I sent for you, Mr. Rockwell, because I am lonely, and wish to talk to you. I suppose you think me supremely selfish in this as in everything else, but I have been quite ill for the last week."

"We are admonished to visit the sick," responded Fred, good-naturedly, "and I am sure it is

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only natural that one who is not well should like some one to enliven him up a bit."

"It is very kind of you to come, I am sure," Boast went on. "I have worried a great deal about a certain misunderstanding that seems to exist between us."

Fred replied that he knew of no particular misunderstanding.

"No," replied Boast. "Not an open one, but I feel that you have failed to comprehend me from the first, Mr. Rockwell, and perhaps, in a measure, I have done you an equal injustice, and may not have interpreted your acts as I should. I do not know whether there is any rational philosophy in the circumstances that seem to environ my life or not."

"Every life, we are told," replied Fred, "is strewn with the broken fragments of day-dreams, high resolves and unfulfilled promises. However, I presume we should mold circumstances rather than permit circumstances to mold us."

"That's it," said Boast. "This eternal trying to direct our destiny brings on an endless conflict, not only between men, but with one's own self. I have almost made up my mind that it is quite impossible for a man to hew out his own fate. Now, as a matter of fact, I respect you, Mr. Rockwell, and have confidence in your ability, honesty and judgment. I think you are making a great success of the

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Prospector. I cannot tell you, nor can I understand myself, the reason for this confidence and respect. I also feel that you cordially dislike me, while on the other hand I have missed no chance of making uncharitable remarks concerning you. Why, I do not know."

Fred was surprised at this seeming sincerity, and began to believe that possibly his scales had been faulty in weighing this man.

"I cannot help being pleased, in a way," he said, "by your frankness. I will admit that I never stopped to analyze my sentiments very closely, regarding yourself, but I will not deny that I have been unable to discover any especial affinity between us. Perhaps this is unfair. If so, I can do no less than make proper amends."

"You speak as if you were willing to be my friend," said Boast. "Friends with me are very scarce. My highest ambition has ever been to win them, and yet it requires no words of mine to tell you what a miserable failure I have made of it all. I would like to be Rufus Grim's friend, but he will not permit me. He does everything he can to influence my cousin, Helen Goodwin, against me, but in this he is not succeeding. She is my friend, and so is Ruth Hilliard," said he, with animation. "By the way, I suppose you know that Mrs. Grim is very ill?"

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"No," said Fred, "I had not heard of it."

"Yes; she has never been very strong and I understand her present sickness is of a very serious nature. She is many years older than her pompous lord and master, and it would not be surprising to hear of her death at any time. Personally, I should regret it, not only on account of my relationship, but also on account of Helen. I dread to think what might happen if my aunt should die."

"You do not regard her illness as being as grave as that, do you?"

"The case looks serious," replied Boast, without removing his eyes from the cheerful fire and the red coals on the hearth. "I would like to go and see her, but I presume Rufus Grim would not allow me in the house."

"What I desired most to say," continued Boast, brightening up and putting aside the theme of his aunt's indisposition, "is this: I want you for my friend, and would like to be yours."

For a moment Fred was quite at a loss to know what to say, and made no reply. After a pause that threatened to become embarrassing, he said: "I could certainly do no less, Mr. Boast, than to meet you half way, I am sure, in such an ambition."

"Ambition!" said Boast. "What a detestable word. I sometimes think ambition has been the cause of all my undoing. I have wanted wealth all

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my life, and have never succeeded to any great extent. I ought to be in Waterville now selling town lots. There's great activity down there. I have the inclination, but not the strength. You may not know it, but my health is seriously impaired. I seem to lack vitality."

Fred expressed sympathy, but Boast failed to notice his remarks. "If a man has a clearly defined principle in life to follow, why can't he adhere to it?" he asked, after a short silence.

"I think he can," replied Fred. "In my judgment no life has ever been a success unless a well-defined rule of action—as to policy, not detail—is first laid out and then lived up to."

"Yes," replied Boast, "the rule of life is one thing, but working out the details, that is where the rub comes in. Women should have precepts to follow as well as men; perhaps they have, but they soon become a mess of piece work.

"Do you know," continued Boast, turning his eyes from the burning coals of the grate, and looking coolly at Fred, "that sometimes I have an idea of marrying Ruth Hilliard? I fully made up my mind to do so the other night, but the following morning, before finishing my toilet, I changed my mind, and decided to marry my cousin, Helen Goodwin. It is an open question with me whether a man

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is conferring any especial favor upon a woman when he marries her."

Fred flushed at the mention of Ruth's name, and the vulgar presumption of Boast. However, Boast had drawn the thorn almost as soon as he had thrust it into his flesh, and he remained silent a little while. Boast looked at him as if he expected a reply.

Finally looking up, Fred said: "There are three paths, Mr. Boast, for every life in the crucial moment of indecision. One lies along the highway of domesticity, and its restful, peaceful ways, where shady places abound, and purling waters flow and tender care is found in moments of sickness and sorrow. Another is the path across the passionate desert of sand-dunes with some faithful friend and chum who gives only quid-pro-quo for civilities extended—a happy day affair in the sunshine of warmest infatuation, but a sad disappointment in the dark and dreary days of sorrow. And still another path is that of selfish celibacy that carries us into regions of lonely discontent with the world, its people and ourselves—a void, instead of hope, creeps into the soul, and we weep when none may see or know, for a green oasis and a lost opportunity."

"I wish I could believe your philosophy," replied Boast. "I go to sleep at night, filled with the most laudable ambitions, but awaken the next morning to pursue an entirely different course, and

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therein lies the conflict. But I know, Mr. Rockwell, I am boring you."

Fred assured him he was not, but soon after Boast became silent, as if the interview were over as far as he were concerned, and Fred took his leave.

CHAPTER XXVI

RUFUS GRIM'S LOVE.

AS Fred walked along towards his printing-office home he thought over his strange interview with J. Arthur Boast, and it perplexed him. If Boast was sincere in his statements, what a different light was thrown on his character. "Yes," he said to himself, "I will try to be his friend. Perhaps I have misunderstood him, but he is even more of a conceited coxcomb than I believed, if he thinks he can win the love of Ruth Hilliard."

The next morning the town was startled at the news of Mrs. Grim's death, and the mournful clang of the church bell saddened the fresh morning air, as it tolled fifty-nine times.

Helen Goodwin seemed crushed in her grief, while the rich mine-owner had the sympathy of all the people of Gold Valley in this hour of sorrow. Rufus Grim did nothing by halves, and there could not have been a more splendid show of respect for the departed than were the arrangements he provided. The work on the Peacock was stopped, and the men, on full pay, were invited to the funeral. It was an imposing affair. The crape on Mr. Grim's

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hat was of the widest pattern. Jet studs took the place of diamond ones, and he appeared quite subdued.

Helen looked very interesting in her costume of black. She clung dependently on Mr. Grim's arm during the burial service, and looked unusually pretty, notwithstanding the marks of grief and weeping on her handsome face.

The following day, however, work on the Peacock mine was started up again, and the deep, resounding blasts down below the earth's surface told of more gold flowing into the coffers of Rufus Grim.

The machinery at the Shonbar mine had been behaving badly. Several big breaks had occurred and the work had been delayed repeatedly. The days glided by and October came again.

The rugged rocks high up the mountains overlooking Gold Valley reflected the autumn sun, while the forests were ablaze with gorgeous tints from Nature's pigment.

Mr. Hilliard had ceased, in part, to be as enthusiastic as in former days. Perhaps he felt that he had promised to give up work on the Shonbar if disappointment should be his reward, and it saddened him.

One evening at the Grim mansion, Helen Goodwin had been receiving an unusually large number of callers, and after their departure Rufus Grim

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joined her in the library of his beautiful home. Helen was handsomer than ever, although her dress indicated the bitter grief and great loss she had sustained or her knowledge of its becomingness—perhaps both.

The months that had intervened since the death of Mrs. Grim had not made Rufus Grim forget the proper melancholy tone which formality, at least, demanded he should exhibit.

Helen knew this man too well not to be aware that she was playing with fire, and that he was not to be handled as were most of her satellites. He was not one to be put off indefinitely, for when he wanted anything, he generally got it. She knew that for her there was a time coming when it would have to be "yes" or "no." She had long known of his love, of his ambition to share his great fortune with her—perhaps the time had come. She was frightened, and alarmed, but she was too clever an actress to show perturbation.

He was a confident man, and positive now, as always, of the final result; nevertheless, there was a timidity about him as he approached this crisis in his life that prevented him from experiencing the complete assurance he would have liked to feel. The trumpet blast of fame is shrill, and—its music at best surcharged with interrogation points—is fretful, discordant and harsh, while the veiled form in

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the mist shudders pathetically as the goal of ambition hangs idly in the starless firmament of a shoreless night, waiting, waiting, waiting for the verdict of a loved one.

Rufus Grim sat down beside Helen, and after a few commonplace remarks, said in a low, yet audible, voice, "Helen, I've got a heap to tell you to-night."

"Yes," she lisped innocently, looking up into his face with a little laugh that was like the bubbles of the cup before the wine touches the lips.

"Helen," Grim went on, "I love you; yes—love you." His hands trembled and his voice was unsteady.

"You've always been very kind to me," lisped Helen, and there was real gratitude in her words.

"Yes, yes. I've had an eye out for you since the day your ma brought you here." He had taken her hands in his, but they were unresponsive. "No livin' man," continued Grim, "could love you more than me. Sure, you know it, honey, don't you? For ain't I always given you what money can buy?"

"Always," murmured Helen, as she leaned her head against his shoulder, to hide her face from his searching eyes.

"Yes, I kep' you," he went on, placing his arm around her slender form, and drawing her a little closer, "I've kep' you from that devil, your cousin,

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Arthur Boast. I hate him, for I knew he was tryin' to make you love him, and that's why I turned him down cold. I despise him."

"How could you think of such a thing?" lisped Helen, in her soft, cooing way, yet with a half indignant intonation in her voice, that was almost like a caress in its softness.

"Oh, I'm restin' content now," replied Grim, and his old, pompous air and manner of speech began to assert themselves. "Not knowin' before how to show you my heart, I, bein' a husband, couldn't, of course—now we're livin', ain't we darlin'? Do you love me, Helen? I'm sure you do, but tell—tell me, quick!"

Lifting her dainty head and looking in a half-dreamy way straight into the eyes of the man who was infatuated with her, she replied: "Love you? Why you know I do, dear."

She was satisfied with herself and with her clever duplicity, for well she knew she did not love this ignorant man, but only loved herself—and loved so ardently that she was willing, if worst came to worst, even to marry him and strip conscience naked if by so doing she might clothe her poor mortal body in silks and satins.

Poor man; he was big, strong, selfish and overbearing, but this artful bit of femininity was his idol. There may have been a thread of scarlet in

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the warp and woof of her nature, but, if so, he did not know it, and went blindly on while every beat of his heart was a throb of love for her. He took her awkwardly in his arms and kissed her, completely absorbed and satisfied at last as he looked longingly at the drooping head on his breast. This was the one surrender of his life, and his heart was hungry for the affection that had been left out of his hard, starved existence in the cruel, exacting world of money-getting.

Yes, she was deceiving him. She was the affianced wife of J. Arthur Boast. Yet, her part must be played, and played well, and she was wondering what the end of the game would be.

"And may I one day call you wife?" said Grim, kissing her fluffy brown hair. "Say in a year from now," he urged, determinedly.

"Yes—it shall be as you say," she replied, softly.

Once there was a man and a woman. She gave him a beautiful casket. It was sealed and very heavy. She said it was filled with gold and precious stones. He was honored and proud of the trust. One day he opened the casket—and he died. Instead of gold and precious stones, it was filled with rocks and rubbish. It was not the deceiving, but the being undeceived that stung him to his death.

Helen was mentally saying: "How shall I get

out of this horrible scrape?" She rather enjoyed the excitement of it—even the danger; but why, she thought, had she ever been such a fool as to promise to marry Arthur. She must have been insane, or she never would have done so.

What a wonder it is that there is any success at all in life, when we consider the contrary and conflicting forces that are vigorously and continuously at work under the lace covering of life's satin skin.

Mr. Grim had said within a year—that was a long while. She would have ample time to free herself in some way. Arthur was adorable, but penniless. He must also make a sacrifice if he were not resourceful enough to help her out of this complication. She even laughed, in a quiet way, at the ridiculousness of the situation, and lisped to herself: "Love or Money? The Lady or the Tiger?"

Many a woman in the aftermath of reflection thinks she has sold herself to the devil, when, as a matter of fact, she has merely entered her name on his waiting-list.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GOLDEN MAUSOLEUM.

RUFUS GRIM was happy. He would conceal his joy for one short year, and then—and then. He had at last reached the topmost pinnacle of all his worldly hopes. Wealth was his, and now he had secured the promise of Helen Goodwin to be his wife. He called at his lawyer's office the next day and told him he wished to add a codicil to his will. He spoke in his usually loud and confident way, and never forgot for a moment that he was not only the richest man in Gold Valley, but by long odds the most fortunate.

The lawyer knew his client. He knew his whims and wisely humored his eccentricities. It needed but little encouragement and flattery discreetly administered, to set Rufus Grim going, recounting the steps he had carved for himself on life's journey, and the height to which he had climbed all by his own efforts.

While Grim was in the lawyer's office, Arthur Boast came in and took a seat in an outer room. Grim requested the lawyer to close the door and asked him why he permitted that young scoundrel

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to come around the office. Then he thought of his being the victor in love's contest, and why should he hold malice against this whipper-snapper? The wicked may not be envious, but the envious are always wicked, and he would not be such a fool as to quarrel with Arthur Boast, since he himself had captured Helen Goodwin's love.

He again referred to the changing of his will, and when the lawyer was ready he dictated a codicil, bequeathing all of his possessions, unconditionally, to Helen Goodwin. The lawyer showed no signs of astonishment at Rufus Grim's action, although he guessed the relationship which now existed between Helen Goodwin and his client.

That night a clandestine meeting took place between Helen Goodwin and Arthur Boast. Helen was wondering how she would still the tempest she had evoked. Her first words, after greeting Arthur with a kiss of welcome, were in regard to the ordeal, as she called it, which she had passed through with Mr. Grim.

"To think, Arthur, of that old fool asking me to be his wife! I was so surprised that I did not know what to do. I really never expected such a thing."

"And what did you say?" asked Boast doggedly.

"Why, you darling boy, what could I say but to give him to understand that perhaps I would be

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willing sometime in the future. I told him to wait a year, and then——”

“Yes, and then?” growled Arthur. “What then?”

“Oh, don’t be foolish, dear,” she said, slipping her arm about his neck. “You know I was only pretending. You also know that I hate him.” And then she stamped her little foot vigorously.

“You must remember, dear,” she continued, “that I have been dependent upon his bounty for so many years. I am only too ready, Arthur, to go with you; yes, to the ends of the earth.” She caressed him tenderly, and all the wrinkles in Arthur’s temper were smoothed away by her loving assurances.

A weak man may be constant, constant in his weakness, even as a coward may seem brave in sullen silence; silent because he is tongue-tied with fear; and Boast, although a weak man in many respects, was as constant and sincere in his savage love for this woman as his vacillating nature would permit, but he saw her through the mist of their mutual sinning, and while he had told her he would marry her, yet he never intended to do so, if he could secure the fortune of Rufus Grim in any other way. He did not stop to consider how he was to secure the fortune through Helen, but until he could perfect a plan he must not break with

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this woman, who appealed to him with her siren-like beauty. He had heard Rufus Grim dictating the codicil to his will, for his lynx-like ear was at the keyhole. At the time he was angry, for he feared Helen was, perhaps, deceiving him, but later, however, he felt assured that she knew nothing of the codicil, and if she were to be the heiress to such great wealth, the sooner he married her, if at all, the better.

He would not tell her of the will—no, but he would marry her, and keep their marriage a secret until—well, until later—something might happen that would show him a way. Possibly he could not get the fortune without Helen—yes, it would be safer, he reasoned, to marry her.

“We must not delay our marriage much longer, Helen,” he said, after a short silence, in which he had been doing some rapid thinking.

“How dear of you,” lisped Helen. “You really must save me from that old bear.”

“Did he attempt to kiss you?” asked Arthur, bluntly.

“Why, yes,” said Helen, slowly. “He kissed me once.”

“Kissed you once,” shouted Arthur, as he pushed her roughly from him with an oath. Jealousy is a form of insanity, ruling reason, embittering existence, sympathizing with suspicion, dethron-

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ing decency, and filling the heart with the putrid perfumes of purgatory.

"Arthur, you will break my heart," she cried, with fright and pain—then, creeping closer to him, and clasping his arm with both her little hands, she looked up at him. "He did kiss me, but how could I help it? He is so overbearing and so determined and strong. I did not know but he would turn me away from home unless I humored him, deceived him—don't you understand? Won't you forgive me? Really, could I help it?"

"No, ——" said Arthur, hesitating a moment, and then clasping her passionately to his breast. "You were not to blame—forgive me for my anger." Even Arthur Boast could not look into the eyes of this alluring woman, whose enticing beauty was a fragment from hell, and not be mastered by her. "Yes, I'll forgive you anything, you siren. But you must arrange to leave the home of Rufus Grim, and I will arrange that we may be married at once. But mind," continued Boast, determinedly, "our marriage must, for the present, be a secret one."

"Oh, Arthur, you make me so happy; I could starve, yes, I would rather starve with you, than live with Mr. Grim, even though he possesses millions." Doubtless at the time, she really believed what she was saying.

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"I think we had better be married very soon, say in two weeks."

"Oh, that's impossible," said Helen in surprise.

"No, it is not impossible," replied Boast, almost savagely. "I say we must be married in two weeks. Then you will go to my father's and visit indefinitely. Of course, I will be absent."

"Why, Arthur," protested Helen, "you are the most unreasonable man living; you are, indeed. How can I be married in two weeks? It would look so strange when it is only so short a time since mamma died."

"It must be as I say," insisted Arthur determinedly. "It is for your good. I know things that cannot be explained. You are left alone in the world, and, Helen—there, don't cry, little girl. You must realize that I understand what is for the best and that I wish to protect you." She finally yielded reluctantly, and thus the compact was sealed.

The next day was one long to be remembered in Gold Valley. Mr. Hilliard called at the office of the *Prospector*, and told Fred that they had at last reached the five-hundred-foot level. "Yes," said the old miner, with more interest than he had exhibited for some time, "we have certainly had more trouble, suh, in sinkin' these last one hundred feet than all the other distances put together, but we have kept right along, and finally, suh, we are five hun-

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dred feet below the surface. Of cou'se there's lots of work yet to be done, in fact, a powerful lot of cross-cuttin' into the vein, but in a very short time, with my present force of men, the work will be completed.

"It's a very proud moment of my life, suh, to tell you that after all the trials and delays we have had, that finally we are down to the five-hundred-foot level; yes, suh, we are, indeed.

"There's another little matter, Mr. Rockwell, that I wish to speak to you about. I'm goin' to be a trifle short of money for the pay roll. I think, possibly, I have enough for this comin' week. We have a number of men workin', and I am anxious to keep all of them until we finish cross-cuttin'."

Fred was aghast. He did not know what to do. Here was a dilemma that for a moment startled him with confusion, but he finally confessed to Mr. Hilliard that the six thousand dollars he had last given him was, practically, every cent of ready cash he had in the world; that he had written to Judge Ansley, who had charge of his estate in New York City, and the judge interpreted his father's will to mean that it was necessary for him to live in New York City to enjoy the annuity from the estate.

Mr. Hilliard thought for a moment, and then said: "Don't bother yourself, Mr. Rockwell, it's a matter of very little importance anyway, I assure

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you, suh; I know my men. Most of them have been workin' for me for over a year, and I feel perfectly confident that they will stand by me until we finish the cross-cuttin', even if I haven't the ready money with which to pay them. They're a grand lot of fellows, I assure you they are; and between you and me, suh, every one of them has great confidence in the Shonbar, wonderful confidence."

The old optimist said good-bye to Fred, and started for the mine, while Fred returned to his work with a heavy heart. He was far from being convinced that Ben Hilliard felt the confidence in his men that he had expressed.

The winter was late in coming. Although it was the first of November, the air was comparatively mild and yet invigorating.

That evening Rufus Grim walked back and forth on his wide porch, thinking of his own importance. After a little he went down through the village, and following a by-path along the mountains continued his way up towards the old prospect shaft of the Peacock mine. The night was still and beautiful; the moon was in its last quarter, but its rays were obscured by the lazy, drifting clouds that hung idly in the heavens.

Arriving at the old shaft, he took off his hat and pushed his fat fingers through his heavy hair. He even unbuttoned his coat as he leaned against the

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collar of the shaft. Far below him the lights of Gold Valley shone from many windows. He thought of his home, from which the gleams of light twinkled across the valley, and of Helen, who in one year was to be his bride.

"Yes, she loves me," he muttered aloud. "She's a mighty fine girl. I 'most knew she would marry me—she's got a heap of sense. What a way she has about her! What little hands! Gee! It was mighty hard to tell her, but no man, I reckon, could have done it better than I did. No, sir; Rufus Grim is always on top for everything. After the knot's tied we'll go to New York and Washington. Every place we go they'll say I have a queen; you bet they will. They'll all want her, but they ain't no more like her; no, sir. Helen—the finest name in the world. Yes, she knew—she knew. She was waitin' all the time, even refusin' that scoundrel, J. Arthur Boast. He is a sly dog, though, and I really was afeard of him, but now that's all done and sewed up tight as a pigskin bottle.

"I wish my lawsuit was over; too bad that still hangs fire, but the findin' of the court above'll be the same as the court below, I'm sure. Yes, I'm lucky; there ain't none luckier on the face of the earth. I come into this camp with nothin'—now look at me." He chuckled quietly to himself, and absent-mindedly kicked his foot against the old

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shaft collar. "Here's the place I struck it rich. I dasn't blame the dogs of war for bein' on my track. Of course, they want a divvy of this 'ere mine, but, blank them, they ain't goin' to git it. No, sir; it's mine, Rufus Grim's. The gold's all mine, inside and outside, and no court nor jury can git 'tween me and my ambition. My first, yes, my everlastin' ambition is gold, but standin' side by side is this 'ere love for Helen. God bless her!

"There's only one like me, all thanks are due to just myself. I've had a hard, rough time, and no one to help me—but one by one they've had to git over on my side, and now I'm on top of the heap—yes, by big odds. I'll make my marriage a big thing, and with my gold and my way-up wife, I'll begin livin'. No, sir; I've never lived before; I've never had any flowers in life; just thistles, and hard, weary diggin' has been for me. I've worked and slaved and slaved and worked, but now—now I'm gettin' ready to live."

Thus Rufus Grim fed himself with his own egotism, and recounted life's victories resulting from his indomitable exertions.

A dark form crouched near him, dimly outlined in the uncertain light. Presently it moved and crept stealthfully, silently toward him. Then there was a hurried rush, a whistling noise cut sharply through the still air—a stifled cry, a heavy fall, and

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the body of Rufus Grim plunged forward into the yawning mouth of the old prospect shaft, and a life's work was over. His anticipated happiness, his pompous joy, his earthly prosperity, his vanity and vainglory, all were over.

It mattered not now as to what the decision of earth's court might be, but rather the decision of that higher court in Heaven. A splash from the murky waters far below resounded back to the outer world like a farewell echo, and Rufus Grim's mangled remains rested near the gold he loved so well. In the vault where his manhood had been bartered for gold, he fell asleep.

There was gold on every side—gold above him, gold beneath him—a priceless mausoleum.

At last all that was mortal of this man of inordinate worldly ambitions and restless energy reposed in the endless sleep of unbroken stillness.

And thus from life's map passed forever away Rufus Grim, sans happiness, sans home, sans hope.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CROSS-CUTTING IN THE MINE.

THE next day Rufus Grim was missed from the Peacock. His mine manager could not understand it. Never before had he absented himself from his office without giving the most detailed instructions in regard to the work in the mine. When the following morning came and he was still away, the manager's fears ripened into alarm, and soon all the people of Gold Valley were discussing the mystery of Rufus Grim's disappearance.

A vigorous search was at once instituted, which resulted, a few days later, in finding his lifeless body at the bottom of the old prospect shaft. At the coroner's inquest a verdict was rendered of murder by some person or persons unknown, based on the evidence of the peculiar wounds on the back of the head.

He was laid to rest by the side of his wife with a demonstration that far exceeded any former funeral in Gold Valley.

Such a cowardly murder, even though the man was so thoroughly disliked during his life, excited the sympathy of all, and Rufus Grim's numerous

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faults were hidden away by that great leveler, Death. People forgot the pompous, overbearing owner of the Peacock mine in listening to the minister's sympathetic words of commendation over the mangled remains of Rufus Grim, the citizen.

The mystery surrounding his death appealed to all law-abiding men to hunt down the cowardly assassin. In the feverish excitement, it was remembered that Marc Casey and Gideon Gibbons were sworn enemies of the rich mine owner; indeed, the latter had even threatened his life in the presence of numerous witnesses.

The sheriff, who had so ignominiously failed in running down the stage robbers, took the lead in trying to ferret out the murderer and bring him to justice. A few days later warrants were sworn out for the arrest of Gideon Gibbons and Marc Casey, charging them with the crime. Gibbons was arrested but Casey could not be found.

He had disappeared a few days after the murder, and no one knew his whereabouts. Gibbons maintained a dogged silence, and was completely subdued and humiliated when he saw that not one of his many supposed friends came forward to sign his bond. Hand-cuffed and accompanied by the sheriff, he appealed to many, but without success.

Fred made himself very unpopular by offering

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to sign Gideon Gibbons' bond. The people were indignant, and declared Fred was carrying his dislike for Rufus Grim entirely too far. As he had no property excepting his interest in the Shonbar, which was a non-producing mine, he was considered incompetent and promptly rejected.

One evening not long after this Fred was working quite late setting type in the *Prospector* office. It was past midnight when he retired to his sleeping room, and while slipping the bolt of his door he heard someone knocking at the entrance of the printing office. He hastened to admit his visitor and found it to be J. Arthur Boast.

"Good evening, Mr. Rockwell," he said, "I have come to see you at this unholy hour on a little matter of great importance to myself."

"Come in," said Fred cheerfully, but greatly surprised. "I have no light in this room. Come into my bedroom."

"You remember a conversation we had," said Boast, abruptly, "not long ago, about being friends."

Fred said that he did.

"Well, I have come tonight to claim a little of the reciprocal friendship you promised me at that time.

"As I have observed before," continued Boast, "circumstances control man's destiny. To think of us sitting down talking as friends, would, a little

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while ago, have seemed preposterous, and yet I am happy to know that we meet as such tonight!" His eyes were restless and burned with the brightness of keenest excitement. "Friendship is such an abused word. Acquaintances, or those whom we have known for years, may be friendly, and yet not friends. Friendship is a sort of heart sentiment, sacred and imperishable. Like gold—it is where you find it. It is a discovery."

Fred started to speak, but Boast waived him to silence, and went rapidly on, saying: "What impelled me to send for you that night you visited me at the hotel I am unable to explain; an impulse I was not strong enough to overcome forced the issue, I guess." He laughed in a jerky fashion. "I feel, Mr. Rockwell, that I have much to be thankful for in the enjoyment of your friendship, and yet it has all been brought about by circumstances over which I have no control. It is not the result of premeditated judgment, but the outcome of an impulse." He stopped short and looked squarely at his listener, as if waiting for a reply.

"I hope," said Fred, after almost an awkward pause, passing Boast a cigar, and lighting one himself, "that you have no regrets in regard to our late friendly understanding."

"No, indeed," replied Boast, beamingly. "On

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the contrary, I feel that I am the most fortunate of men. By the way, this is an excellent cigar."

"Yes," replied Fred, "each one is a sort of fulfillment. The other day I received a box from one of my New York friends. It is a luxury that I am not able to indulge in very freely, unless some old chum happens to remember my isolation in these Western mountains and shows remembrance and friendship in this way."

"Have I told you," said Boast, "that I have quit drinking?"

"No," replied Fred, with a rising inflection.

"Yes, I have chucked red liquor altogether—cut it out entirely. The habit got quite a hold on me, and I was going down hill at a pretty rapid pace; in fact, I had given up hope of ever being anything but a blanked sot. Scarcely had I reconciled myself to that belief, when a whim, a caprice, an impulse, or whatever you may call it, took hold of me and said, 'No more liquor, J. Arthur Boast; not another blanked drop,' and from that day to this I have not tasted the abominable stuff."

Fred assured him that he was glad to know of his reformation.

"To continue," said Boast, "I am in love, desperately so." Again he laughed in apparent embarrassment.

"In love?"

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"Yes, I am in love with my cousin, Helen Goodwin, and she reciprocates my affection. On her account, if not on my own, I am glad my appetite for liquor has been overcome, and that reminds me of the object of my visit." He wheeled about on his chair, and looked steadfastly into a darkened corner of the room and then went on to say.

"Helen is such a stickler for formalities, and so sensitive regarding her mother's death, that I have had hard work to convince her that our marriage should take place, according to the original arrangements, day after tomorrow. Her step-father's death, of course, has complicated matters still further, and she thought we ought to postpone the affair. As usual, however," continued Boast, "I have convinced her that she is wrong and that I am right, and have finally gained her consent, on one condition—that you and Miss Ruth Hilliard will favor us with your presence and act as groomsman and bridesmaid."

Fred was half startled at Boast's remarks, and for a moment did not know what to say. To him Helen seemed to be one who would find the surrender incurred by accepting a wedding ring most galling because of its fettering environments.

At best, even a successful love is an iron hand encased in a velvet glove of courteous consideration and responsive goodness; but perhaps Boast

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possessed these attributes, at least Fred hoped so for Helen's sake.

"It will be a very quiet affair," said Boast, still looking into the darkened corner, while his voice was noticeably subdued. "Immediate relatives and all that, she has none; neither have I, excepting my mother and father. So there you are. We are to be married at my father's.

"I imagine," he went on, "that friendships between women are generally like a traffic arrangement between railroads, each secretly expecting to get the better of the bargain, but Helen really loves Ruth. They have been chums for a number of years, and since you do not disclaim friendship for me, I am sure you will not refuse my request."

Fred promised to consider the matter and let Boast know the next day, after consulting Ruth.

"Very well," replied Boast, "I will call tomorrow. It is really too bad," Boast went on, "that a weak little woman like Helen should have to endure so much suffering as she has had in the last few months. Actuated by sympathy as well as love I feel it is my duty to set all formalities aside, marry her, and thus insure to myself the privilege of protecting and caring for her as she deserves."

"Yes," replied Fred, "she certainly has had much sorrow. By the way, Mr. Boast, do you be-

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lieve Gideon Gibbons guilty of the murder of Rufus Grim?"

Boast relit his cigar before answering. "Mr. Rockwell," he said, after deliberating a few moments, and looking hard at the ceiling of the room, "I hope Mr. Gibbons is innocent. I have tried to look calmly at his case, shrouded in mystery, as you well know it is. I have tried to close my ears to whisperings and prejudices and not jump with the multitude at a hasty conclusion. Of course, the circumstantial evidence against Mr. Gibbons is rather damaging. Mr. Casey's disappearance, and Mr. Gibbons' continued silence as to Casey's whereabouts, makes it look still worse. The probability is that nine out of ten of the people of Gold Valley believe him guilty. They have built up a wall of prejudice around him that seems impregnable, and unless the public temper is permitted to cool they will very likely convict him. To me mercy seems preferable to a hasty judgment." Boast had risen and was leaning against the mantel, and when he ceased speaking his face was turned toward Fred, who had been walking back and forth. For a moment there was silence—these two men stood looking at each other.

"Well, Mr. Rockwell," concluded Boast, with a forced laugh, as if to break the silence, "I will say good-night; and I beg your pardon for calling

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at such an unreasonable hour, but it was an urgent case, and when you get as near your nuptials as I am, I will forgive you if you pull me out of bed at any time of the night."

"A strange man," said Fred to himself after Boast had gone. "He talked like a philosopher, and his judgment seems seasoned with mercy. Perhaps people have not understood him. The heart is lied about in the most cruel fashion by the perverse tongues of men and women. If hearts could speak they would tell only truths, do away with trouble and flood the world with happiness. But, perhaps love has been the crucible in which this man's character has been purified, for love never made a man a brute, but it has made many a brute a man. After all, it's rather odd that he and Helen are to be married. I know Ruth will be surprised. Perhaps it is best, and the very fact that he makes her his wife at this time, when she is left so completely alone, really ennobles the fellow to me."

Before retiring Fred wrote a note to Ruth, leaving the matter of attending the wedding entirely to her judgment, and concluded by saying:

"I take the liberty of enclosing herewith a sealed envelope containing something I have written and which I desire you shall not read until your father has made the necessary cross-cuts to the vein in the

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Shonbar. I am sure you will respect my wishes, and not open the note until the time indicated."

The letter which he had so carefully written and sealed, ran as follows :

My Dear Ruth, My Best of Friends:

I have long wished to have a confidential understanding with you, but environments and conditions seem to have prevented. Today I received a letter from my old housekeeper in New York City, containing a dainty little boutonniere of violets, which is herewith enclosed.

I anticipate another disappointment in the Shonbar, and want you to know two things. One is, that I do not care, in one way, a *sou marquee*, for all the gold there may or may not be in your father's mine, and the other is that I have a single absorbing hope in my heart—it is this: That some time, dear Ruth, you will journey with me far away from these bleak and dreary hills, where so many disappointments have entered into your father's life and so many privations into your own.

I have a hope that together we will go to my Eastern world, and there you will have your heart's desire of the violets you love so well. Together we will go where the violets are as numerous as the leaves of the forest, where, for your dear sake, it shall rain violets; where even the dew that comes down from Heaven in the silent hours of night will bring myriads of these messengers of gentlest love; where the very air shall be redolent with the perfume of these blossomed thoughts of angels.

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Your path, dear friend, shall be strewn with violets, and when in the ripeness of time we shall, at the appointed hour, go on to that other and better world, we will together ask God to crown you, not with gold, but only with the simple little violets you love so well.

I long to return to my home, but the very word "home" is empty and meaningless unless you share it with me. Those who are dear to you, shall be dear to me, "my people shall be your people, your God my God, and where thou goest, I shall go."

Faithfully and devotedly,

FRED ROCKWELL.

The following day a favorable answer was given to Boast, and the marriage took place the next evening. It was a very quiet affair. Whether Colonel Boast and his wife approved of their only son's marrying his cousin, Fred was unable to satisfactorily decide, but he and Ruth expressed themselves as being freed from an indescribable restraint, after taking their departure, for it was a wedding that steeped one's mood in shadow for days after.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LAST BLAST.

THE marriage of J. Arthur Boast and Helen Goodwin was at once announced, and was quickly followed by the discovery that Helen was the sole heiress of the vast possessions of the murdered mine owner. Rufus Grim's attorney became the trusted adviser of Arthur Boast. Work in the great Peacock mine continued, and within a week J. Arthur Boast was in full control of affairs.

Gratification in its entirety is the most illusive word in our language, but Boast's responsibilities subdued without irritating him. The people were quick to recognize elements of great strength in the new controller of the Peacock mine, and vied with each other in giving him encouragement.

Boast belonged to that class of egotists noted for evincing at times startling generosity, but who, immediately after bestowing a gift, put their ear to the ground and breathlessly listen for the acclaim of gratitude and praise for which their insatiable vanity thirsts.

Work in the Shonbar had not been progressing smoothly. Mr. Hilliard, fired with optimistic en-

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thusiasm, believed the men employed in cross-cutting from the five-hundred-foot level would remain with him, although his finances were practically exhausted.

It was the following Saturday night that he called his men about him and explained his temporary embarrassment. He paid them off in full and assured them that only a few more days' work, with their united assistance, was necessary to reach the gold for which he had been seeking many weary years, and, in his chivalrous way, he expressed confidence that all of his employees would report Monday morning for work, and stay with him until the cross-cutting was finished.

However, the following Monday found but half a dozen men ready for work, to Mr. Hilliard's great chagrin.

The old gentleman went into the mine with his few faithful adherents, and encouraged them with undaunted activity and energy. What would have been accomplished by twenty men working in shifts in a few days, would require much longer with only his six assistants. They lessened the width of the cross-cut, however, and this meant considerable saving of time. Throughout the week Mr. Hilliard and his few helpers labored incessantly.

When the next Monday morning came around he found only three of his workmen reported. This

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was, indeed, discouraging, but with a determination that knew no such word as fail he went on, for duty and self-sacrifice are the impulses that actuate brave and noble men to dedicate their lives to an idea.

Two days later his three assistants advised him that their families were in want of the necessities of life, and while they had unbounded faith in the Shonbar, their first duty was to their kindred, and they could not remain with him longer.

After this the two surface men took turns in helping Mr. Hilliard. One man remained in the engine room performing the work of both. After a couple of days of monotonous drilling and blasting Mr. Hilliard told Ruth of his great discouragement.

"My dear daughter," he said, "they have all deserted me; I am left alone to finish the work in the mine, as best I can. It's powerful humiliatin' to be deserted just when I'm reachin' for the last round of the ladder."

Ruth had slipped her arm around her father's neck while he was speaking. "Daddy, dear," she said, "why not go to Mr. Rockwell? He has been so true to you, and I am sure, now that you are so near finishing the work, he will give you what assistance is needed."

The old man stroked his daughter's cheek tenderly. "Yes, dear, you are right; he would help

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me if he could. No one seems to understand me, Ruth, my dear child, exceptin' you and Mr. Rockwell. I may as well let you know that I called on Mr. Rockwell several days ago, for a little more money, and he informed me the six thousand dollars he had last given us was practically every dollar of ready money he had in the world. It made my old heart bleed to see the pained expression on the noble young fellow's face, pained because he could not help me further. I explained to him that it made no particular difference; that my men—the rascals who have so shamefully deserted me—had confidence in the Shonbar, and assured him that they would stand by me for a few days longer."

Mr. Hilliard paced back and forth in a distressingly nervous, agitated way, at times holding his head between his hands. "My God, it will drive me crazy!" he finally exclaimed in an outburst of grief. "The work must be finished!" Ruth was frightened at his manner. Suddenly she noticed that he appeared to be older than ever before. The wrinkles in his face had turned into gulleys, as if a cloudburst of disappointment had deepened the furrows, and in her sympathy she condemned herself for not having given him more help and encouragement.

"Daddy, why can't I help you?" she asked imploringly.

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"There is no way, my precious child. Come here to me." He seated himself, and she nestled on his lap.

"Now, listen, daddy dear," she said, tenderly but with much firmness. Tomorrow morning I am going with you down to the five-hundred-foot level and assist in your work. I am determined to do this, I am not so strong as a man, but I can surely help you in many ways—the work shall not stop."

"Why, what would Mr. Rockwell say, if he knew my little girl was down in the mine workin'?" said Mr. Hilliard, forcing himself to seem half amused, yet pleased at her earnestness, while he pressed her closer and closer to him.

"Mr. Rockwell?" said Ruth, looking dreamily into the bed of coals in the open grate. "We won't tell him. How good of him it was to give you every dollar he had in the world. Tell me, daddy, do you think any one else would have done as much?"

"No, suh!" replied Mr. Hilliard. "There's better blood cou'sin' through his veins than any man I ever knew. To be sure, he is a Nawthern man—that is, he was born in the Nawth, but even the old State of Virginia never produced a manlier man."

True to her resolve, the following morning Ruth accompanied her father into the Shonbar mine. They were lowered in the bucket to the five-hundred-foot

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level, and proceeded to the face of the cross-cut, where the air-drill rested on its tripod.

Before descending into the subterranean region Mr. Hilliard entrusted the engineer with his gold timepiece, and instructed him to use it in hiring and sending to him at once two laboring men to act as muckers in carrying away the rock and debris as soon as the first shots were fired.

With but little instruction from Mr. Hilliard Ruth handled the air-drill admirably, but the rock was hard, and it required an almost superhuman effort on the part of this frail girl to hold the pulsing instrument in place. Her father relieved her from time to time. Again, while she was masterfully and heroically operating the drill he would be making a crude sort of survey, and a hasty calculation with the measurements on the surface.

"Yes, suh," he said, half to himself, "we are almost to where the vein ought to be."

Three holes were drilled deep into the face of the workings, and three sticks of giant powder inserted, after which Mr. Hilliard spit the fuse, bit the cap, and when lighted, they hastily retired to a place of safety until the blasts resounded, one—two—three—in what seemed hollow mockery, through the caverns of the earth.

It consumed some time before the workings were cleared of powder smoke, notwithstanding the

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great advantage of the air from the air drill. Almost immediately the muckers were lowered, and a little later not only Mr. Hilliard, but even Ruth, joined in clearing away the debris from the cross-cut.

Ruth was almost as impatient as her father to have the air-drill going again, and presently the tripod was set and braced, the air turned on, and the throbbing of the innumerable revolutions of the drill once more resumed.

This time, Mr. Hilliard stated, four holes should be drilled instead of three. It was almost the middle of the afternoon before the tripod was removed and the holes filled with sticks of giant powder.

Again the fuses were lighted, again they retired to a place of safety, and again the massive blocks of porphyritic rock were rent asunder by four explosive blasts.

As soon as possible the muckers began the work of clearing away the result of this last seemingly successful shot. Both Ruth and her father lent their best help and energy in assisting with this strenuous work.

Mr. Hilliard was elated and exhibited an energy that fairly frightened Ruth. He seemed almost maniacal in his desperation.

"Five holes shall be drilled this time," he

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shouted. His voice sounded hoarse and strange in the stillness that followed the shifting of the drill.

"We must finish tonight," he went on. "Daughter, find some more powder. I will hold the drill."

Ruth was quite exhausted and had been resting a moment when Mr. Hilliard shouted: "Come on, my little girl! Come on! Drill! Drill! There's no more time to lose."

"But, daddy," said Ruth, "the last stick of powder is gone from the box. Shall we not send the engineer for more?"

"No!" yelled her father, almost like a frenzied man. "I have no more money for powder. We will use what we have or go without. You must hunt through the boxes and find sticks enough for one more shot—one more blast. We must have five sticks. Here, I will hold the drill, and you go and hunt for more powder."

Ruth was frightened and tears filled her eyes. She feared her father might be losing his mind. Possibly, after all, instead of benefiting him by her constant encouragement and belief in the ultimate outcome of the Shonbar, she had but added to his hallucination, and the shock of another failure might dethrone his reason.

She brushed her tears away and industriously applied herself to hunting in the old powder boxes

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for sticks of powder, hoping that the miners had possibly not used them all. A long search resulted, fortunately, in finding half a dozen sticks. "Yes, there are enough for one more blast," she said to herself as she trudged along the tunnel to where the old miner was at work.

"Where is the powder?" cried Mr. Hilliard, turning to Ruth. She looked up at her father, whose face was begrimed, making a startling contrast with his shock of disheveled hair of snowy whiteness. He had thrown aside his hat and coat, and was strung up to the highest pitch of excitement.

"A moment, daddy," said Ruth, laying her hand on his arm.

"Let me alone, I have no time to wait," he said, petulantly.

"But listen, daddy; won't you listen to me?"

"Well, what is it?" he asked, halting and wiping the perspiration from his brow as he spoke.

"For thirteen years, daddy, you have been trying to find gold in the Shonbar. What if you are no nearer it now than you were thirteen years ago? Will you be so terribly disappointed, daddy, dear? Come, for my sake, tell me you will not." She had her arms about his neck and was looking pleadingly into his face. He pushed her from him.

"You talk as if you doubted," he said. "I'm

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thirteen years nearer success tonight than I was the day I commenced drillin'. It's very humiliatin' for me to think that you, Ruth, should doubt your old father's judgment. Have you forgotten that my blood cou'ses through your veins? Are you, too, turnin' against me at the very last?"

"Oh, daddy," cried Ruth, as she clung to him and buried her head on his breast to stifle her sobs. "Don't speak to me so harshly! Have I not stood by you and believed with you, although all the others, unless it was Mr. Rockwell, turned against you? I believe you are right, daddy, but the ore may be deeper down, and I am only trying to make the disappointment less hard to endure in case failure should again be the result of our efforts."

"There, there, little girl," said Mr. Hilliard, stroking her head tenderly. "I do forgive you, and you must forgive your excitable old father. Let us put in the powder, let us make the last blast, and let its resounding peals tell the whole world that we have done our best."

"Yes, daddy, that we have done our utmost; and after this blast, we will go home still having faith in the Shonbar, although the whole world disbelieves."

"We have plenty of powder here," said the old miner, picking up the sticks, "to tear twenty tons of rock into shreds."

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The cap was bit, the fuse spit and lighted, and they retired for protection while the powder ignited. Then came a deafening roar as if the mountains were being split asunder. One—two—three—four—Mr. Hilliard grasped Ruth's hand with such a vice-like grip that it almost made her cry with pain.

"What is the matter with that fifth blast?" shouted he. They held their breath with impatience. Presently when the suspense seemed almost unbearable, a terrific roar—a hollow, crunching sound, different from the others, a tearing apart, as if God had sent a Samson into the bowels of the earth, to rend the different formations asunder that had been cemented together through the ages.

"The last blast!" cried Mr. Hilliard, when the reverberations had ceased. "We will wait my daughter, we will wait! The smoke will soon clear away, and then we shall see; yes, suh, we shall see!"

CHAPTER XXX

A STARTLING EDITORIAL

FRED knew nothing of Mr. Hilliard's discouraging labors in the mine. Indeed, he had been so busy with other matters that he had found no time to call at the Hilliards' for over a week—a very unusual occurrence—but an idea had come to him, with the force of a conviction, that however essential Ruth might be to his happiness, there was no tangible reason why he should be essential to hers.

A few days prior to Ruth's experience in her father's mine Fred had been disturbed in the middle of the night by some one knocking at his window. It proved to be none other than the missing Marc Casey, accompanied by Bernard McCaffrey, the resident director of Waterville.

Fred admitted them to his room and a consultation followed that lasted several hours. An understanding was finally reached and it was agreed that Marc Casey should remain concealed in Fred's room and await further developments.

"I may make myself amenable to the law," said Fred, laughing, "in concealing a man for whom a

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warrant is issued, but nevertheless I believe what you tell me, and upon the advice of our friend here, shall act my part unflinchingly."

"Of course," said McCaffrey, "it is none of my affair in one sense of the word, but when Mr. Casey came to Waterville, having walked all the way from Gold Valley, by a circuitous route, in order to avoid meeting any one, and explained the truth of the affair, I became interested at once. At best it is little enough good we can do in this world, and we must not permit an innocent man to rest under the charge of such a cowardly crime if it can be prevented."

"You see, pardner," said Marc Casey, "I 'low things are goin' to be pipin' hot in these 'ere diggin's, for I heard a rumor that Gideon and me were to be arrested. I know'd it was no use for us to lay 'round here till our hands and feet were tied, so sez I to Gideon, sez I, 'Gideon, you make your perch here in Gold Valley, and don't you run nary an inch, and I'll scoot out and try to stir up some help and turn the tables on these 'ere chaps.' Of course, none of us liked Rufus Grim any too well, that is, we had no hankerin' love for him, but I 'low we're not quite low down enough to commence murderin' people, even if they do cheat us out of a rich mine like the Peacock. So far, the best we've got is the worst of it.

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"But this 'ere game ain't played out yet," he went on. "The higher court may reverse the decision of the lower court in our lawsuit, and then Gideon and I will have justice, though it's been dangnation slow in comin'."

"I'm surprised at your revelation," said Fred. "It is entirely contrary to my theory of the case. I am beginning to feel, however, that my judgment amounts to very little in this Western country. I will throw a bomb in the enemy's camp by writing an editorial for the *Prospector* that will touch a tender place with the public, if Mr. Casey is correct in his 'statement.'"

It so happened that on the very day Ruth and her father were working down in the mine, the *Prospector* was issued and contained the following editorial:

THE RUFUS GRIM MURDER

The story of Rufus Grim's death, although still shrouded in mystery, will doubtless, when the facts are known, startle the people of Gold Valley even more than the murder itself. It is true that Gideon Gibbons is accused of the crime and that he languishes in the county jail, and that a warrant is out for the arrest of his old associate, Marc Casey. But, in the excitement of the hour, our people may have wrongfully construed circumstantial conditions as proof of guilt. As a matter of fact, not

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one jot or tittle of damaging evidence, in the *Prospector's* opinion, can be produced against these men.

The idea of suicide has been effectually refuted by the findings of the coroner's inquest. No one doubts that it was a cold-blooded, cowardly murder. We believe the murderer is in Gold Valley today, and like the wolf of old, he is clad in sheep's raiment.

Our people should understand the difference between circumstantial evidence and real evidence. It is probably true that both Gideon Gibbons and Marc Casey were on anything but friendly terms with the late Rufus Grim, but they were not his only enemies; indeed, there is one in Gold Valley who was secretly, if not openly, a much greater enemy to the rich mine-owner than either of the suspected parties.

It is time that prejudice gave way to reason, and that others who *profited* much more by the removal of Rufus Grim from the scene of action should not only be suspected, but subjected to the crucial test of a thorough investigation.

This article set the people of Gold Valley to discussing the matter in a different light. The entire town was aroused by the boldness of the *Prospector's* double-leaded editorial.

When J. Arthur Boast read the article he was dazed by its audacity. He sent for his attorney and a consultation was held which lasted far into the night.

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Work on the Peacock was shut down on the following morning, at the request of Boast, and the men assembled at the Company's office. Boast, addressing the miners, said:

"Doubtless you have read the editorial in yesterday's *Prospector*, written by a stranger and interloper in our midst, Mr. Fred Rockwell, who foully accuses me of murdering Rufus Grim. I am going down to the office of the *Prospector* and shall demand an *amende honorable*. As many of you as care to may accompany me."

"Go ahead," the crowd shouted, "we are ready."

The citizens of Gold Valley, almost to a man, sided with Boast, and said that Fred showed a venomous disposition because of J. Arthur Boast's success and unexpected good fortune which was neither dignified nor just.

Boast led the way to the *Prospector's* office, followed by a crowd of determined and grizzled miners and many citizens, who were in a frame of mind that boded no good to Fred Rockwell.

Ruth Hilliard had just come over to the printing-office with a message for Fred from her father, and met Boast at the office door. She tripped lightly past him and saluted Fred with a cheery smile and a "good morning", while Boast paused in the doorway.

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"Good morning, Mr. Rockwell," he said savagely.

"Good morning," replied Fred.

"Who wrote this editorial?" snarled Boast, striking the copy of the *Prospector* which he held in his hand.

"I tell you," he continued, without waiting for a reply from Fred, "I never murdered Rufus Grim, and any man who says I did is a blanked liar and a contemptible scoundrel."

"That's right. Go it, old boy," yelled the mob, standing behind Boast, and ready at a moment's notice to loot the little printing-office.

Fred was apparently calm. He noticed that Boast spoke in his old-time thin piping voice, and that his eyes were restless and glittered like a maniac's. The elements of the philosopher and the shrewd good sense which he had displayed in some of his former conversations with Fred were no longer apparent.

Before Fred could make a reply, Ruth stepped quickly up to Boast, and laying her hand on his arm, said, "Arthur, you know I am your friend. I am sure Mr. Rockwell never accused you of murdering Mr. Grim. What do you mean?"

"But he has accused me," retorted Boast, angrily. "Read that."

Fred stepped hurriedly from behind the case,

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and drawing Ruth gently back, stood face to face with Arthur Boast. "Where," he asked, "have I accused you of murdering Rufus Grim? Point out any sentence in that article where your name appears."

"Well, you haven't used my name, but you might as well have done so."

"No," said Fred, and his eyes were beginning to burn with suppressed anger. "I have not accused you, but you, with your mob of hirelings, have accused yourself. Now, sir, you must, and by the eternal, you shall answer to the law. A guilty conscience needs no accuser, and it is your guilty conscience that has prompted you to come here and publicly charge yourself with the cowardly crime of murdering Rufus Grim. Neither you nor your host of hirelings can intimidate me. If you can stand the test of a thorough examination, and can prove yourself innocent, then I will have no more to say, but until you do this, I shall, by the eternal, publicly accuse you and denounce you from this time forward as the murderer of Rufus Grim."

Fred towered like a giant above the mean and shrinking form of Arthur Boast. Ruth came close to him, almost leaned against his shoulder and said softly to him: "Remember, 'he that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city.'"

"I will try to remember," said Fred, hoarsely,

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as he pushed her gently back and stepped further toward Arthur Boast.

"Well, I don't know that you have exactly accused me in this editorial," whined Boast, retreating a little, "and perhaps I need not take steps of revenge until you dare to use my name in your paper. I'll wait and see what my lawyer advises me to do. Fall back, boys; I have nothing further to say in this interview."

"But I have, and before long I will have much more to say," shouted Fred.

"Well, you won't say it through the columns of the *Gold Valley Prospector*. It is my property—I have the bill of sale in my pocket at this very minute," and there was an exultant leer of the snarling wolf on Boast's face as he said this.

"Yes," said Fred, and there was a look of loathing on his face, "yours is the weapon of a coward. But your plan for securing possession of the *Prospector* has no terrors for me. The copy of the paper you hold in your hand contains the last editorial I ever expect to write for the *Prospector*. It may please you to know that my last dollar is gone; I am penniless, and without interference from you, the *Prospector* has been issued for the last time under my management.

"I have been typo, managing editor, devil, make-up, city editor, publisher and everything else. I

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have finished. I believe you to be a knave, Arthur Boast, if ever there was one, and you and your band of satellites will oblige me by leaving the premises. Come tomorrow morning and take possession; you'll not find me in the way."

Boast turned and facing his mob of backers, said, with a forced laugh on his lips, and a tigerish snarl in his thin voice: "I thought I would squelch him, boys; he had to cave in, you bet."

His voice was shrill and squeaky, and his braggadocio air, as he led his followers away, but poorly hid his nervousness and agitation.

CHAPTER XXXI

PAY ORE

FRED and Ruth were alone. During the interview Ruth was awed with wonderment and alarm. She admired the strength, coolness and self-control of the man before her—it was a new side to his character, and when she heard him say he was now penniless, she remembered the sacrifice he had made for her father's sake. He turned to her and their eyes met. He was still defiant, and there was a look in his face that at first frightened her.

Fred was thinking: "Why not end it all here and now? Why dip the wing longer towards the candle? Fire is fire, no difference where it is found, 'even as an eagle's egg will breed an eagle no difference where it is hatched'."

Suddenly it came to Ruth like a flash that the kindly respect and admiration she had heretofore entertained for this composite of brain, strength and sacrifice was but the prelude of a great love.

Without knowing why, she reached out both her hands towards him—he hesitated for a moment,

then came quickly to her side. Her hands rested in his, but no word was spoken.

The doorway darkened, and as they looked up Mr. Hilliard was surveying the situation with a look of genuine surprise on his face.

"You almost paralyze me, suh, indeed you do," said he, smiling. "I sent my little girl over here to tell you that I had a matter of great importance to talk about with you, but she was so long away that I became impatient, and came over myself."

"Oh, daddy," said Ruth, half hysterically through tears, "Mr. Rockwell and Arthur have had a terrible quarrel."

"A quarrel? What about?"

Fred interrupted, saying: "I am always ready to talk with you, Mr. Hilliard, and will tell you all about it." He said this in a confused, stammering sort of way, still unconsciously retaining one of Ruth's hands.

"Ruth, my little girl," said Mr. Hilliard, "you calm yourself, dry your tears, go over home and prepare dinner. Lay an extra plate for Mr. Rockwell, and we'll have our business talk at once. We will come over a little later."

While no word had been spoken between Fred and Ruth, yet he believed she at last understood him. When she started to go he lifted her hand to his lips with chivalrous respect. As he turned, after

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bidding Ruth adieu, he thought he saw a smile flitting across the face of Mr. Hilliard.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Hilliard; I have some choice cigars which were sent me from New York. There are just two remaining. Here, try this one."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hilliard; "I never felt more like smokin' in my life than I do this mornin'." As they lit their cigars they walked out in front of the office. The crisp and invigorating morning air was mellowed into softness by the sun. Fred narrated in detail his interview with Boast.

"I am sorry this has occurred, Mr. Rockwell; but it cannot be helped. I have to inform you that we have finished the cross-cuttin' work in the Shon-bar."

"I am very glad," was Fred's reply.

"You forced me, suh, at one time to make you a promise," continued Mr. Hilliard. "When I pledge my word of honor, suh, as I did to you, it is sacred. Heretofore you have most naturally asked me what I advised. I now come to you and ask, what do you advise?"

"Mr. Hilliard," said Fred, thoughtfully, "I am glad you ask me, and I'm glad you are such a philosopher about these disappointments. You know when you first came to New York, you thought if

you could only get to the three-hundred-foot level you would cross-cut into a mine of untold wealth."

"Yes, suh, that is so, and you freely gave me the money to push the work."

"Yes," replied Fred, and with the toe of his boot he unconsciously dug into the sand and as if he were seeking the three-hundred-foot level. "At the three-hundred-foot level your efforts were not rewarded! Then you started for the four-hundred-foot level."

"Yes, suh," replied Mr. Hilliard, "and again you gave me the money."

"Yes, yes," said Fred, as the toe of his boot dug still deeper in the sand. "But again you failed. Then I gave you the last dollar of ready money I have in the world to sink the shaft down to the five-hundred-foot level."

"Very true," assented Mr. Hilliard, "and you would have given me more if you had had it."

"Most assuredly," replied Fred, as his foot struck the rock that lay beneath the sand. "Yes," he said, planting his heel firmly on the rock, "you have at last reached the five-hundred-foot level. Heretofore I have listened to your advice, and now I hope you will be guided by mine. I have been away from New York for over two years. I have not left Gold Valley in nearly a year. I have remained close to the Shonbar, alternately hoping and

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doubting that you would be successful. Mr. Hilliard, in a way, I have no regrets. You have been earnest and sincere, although sadly mistaken in regard to this mining venture."

"Well, well, suh?" said Mr. Hilliard, half impatiently, as he waited for Fred to go on.

"I have something further to say to you—I love your daughter—love her devotedly with my whole heart. I have a beautiful home in New York City, with ample means to care for her, and those dependent upon you. My advice is, that you and your daughter and the other members of your family, come with me and leave these Western wilds, so associated with disappointments, and go to my Eastern home.

"This morning, for the first time, I have some reason to believe your daughter understands the devotion and love I give her. You are now an old man, Mr. Hilliard, and while I have no doubt that if you were to sink the shaft to the six-hundred-foot level, say, or perhaps the seven-hundred-foot level, that you would strike the vein of rich gold for which you have been looking many years, but what is the use, Mr. Hilliard? What is the use?

"My regard for your daughter is very great, and I believe it is unselfish. She has given me no word of assurance, yet I hope—and if she reciprocate

cates my affections, then I shall ask God to deal with me as I shall endeavor to deal with her. A home of plenty awaits us. Hardships and failures have alone been the reward of our efforts here in the hills. Why not leave it all? Let us go and forget the trials, the sacrifices and the hopes deferred of a frontier life, and let me help you to spend your remaining years in quiet, peace and contentment."

"You do me honor, suh!" replied Mr. Hilliard, as he brushed a mist from his eyes. "Born in the Nawth, yet you possess the real chivalry of a Southern gentleman. Yes, suh, you do, indeed. It is true we sunk the shaft to the three, the four and finally the five-hundred-foot level, and you, suh, have furnished the money for this great work. I thought my men would remain and help me cross-cut into the vein, but I found, upon speakin' to them about the matter, that they had confidence in the Shonbar only as long as there was money in my purse to pay their wages every Saturday night. When they deserted me, suh, I worked away alone, and finally my little girl Ruth went down in the mine with me yesterday mornin' and we didn't get home until after nine o'clock last night."

"What!" said Fred, in surprise, "has Ruth been working in the mine?"

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"Yes, suh, the hardest day's work I ever experienced I put in with her yesterday in the Shon-bar."

"Why didn't you let me know?" said Fred, half indignantly. "I would gladly have come and helped you rather than have permitted her to do the work of a man, and five hundred feet under ground at that."

"Well, hold on, Mr. Rockwell, let me tell you. We had plenty of giant powder yesterday mornin' and you've no idea how much assistance Ruth gave me. I took the measurements a dozen times, suh, during the day, and it seemed to me that by workin' a little late we might finally blast through the rock to the ore."

"Yes, Mr. Hilliard, 'where the ore might have been'," added Fred, with an incredulous laugh, while he again struck the heel of his boot in an absent way against the rock. Mr. Hilliard paid no attention to the interruption.

"Finally we made our last drill, and filled it with every stick of powder but one we had left. My Ruth had to go through all the old powder boxes in order to find enough to make the last blast. We retired, suh, as usual, after we bit and lit the fuse, and you ought to have heard that last explosion. My daughter, God bless her! tried to dull the disappointment that she felt was waitin' our efforts,

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by gettin' me to promise not to take it too much to heart; but I had confidence, suh, right up to the last. Well, the smoke cleared away, and my God! suh, my old eyes wept for joy."

"What!" exclaimed Fred.

"Look at this piece of ore, Mr. Rockwell; the richest of sylvanite, yes, suh; richer than anything ever discovered, even in the Peacock mine. My dear Mr. Rockwell, we have made our last blast, and the Shonbar is worth at least three million dollars. The agent of a rich minin' corporation of Butte City conceded that we have a thousand feet of the Peacock ore chute, and made me an offer of three million dollars this mornin' for our mine!"

CHAPTER XXXII

AT LAST!

THE effect on the people of a mining-camp of a fabulously rich "strike" like the Shonbar proved, may be imagined, but cannot be described. Shopkeeper, citizen and miner alike go wild with excitement over so important a discovery.

Congratulations were showered on Mr. Hilliard and Fred from all quarters. Every one in Gold Valley felt it to be his privilege to call at the home of Mr. Hilliard and pay his respects to one who had lived so long among them, and who had so persistently and patiently maintained unbounded confidence in a proposition that was looked upon by nearly every one as a money-losing venture.

Independent of the fortune left him by his father, Fred was now wealthy. In his prosperity he did not forget his old friends. He called on the sheriff and again offered himself as bondsman for Gideon Gibbons. The bond was accepted, and half an hour later Gideon was released. Marc Casey surrendered himself, and was almost immediately bailed out of custody.

"You see, Gideon," said Marc Casey, "the ta-

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bles are sure enough turnin'—heretofore the best we've been gittin' has been the worst of it, but now, the worst we git is the best of it."

One evening the stage-coach brought to Gold Valley Wilbur Winthrop and his young wife, Virginia Hilliard. They had planned and carried out a great surprise to the Hilliard family, for no one knew they were going to be married.

"And this accounts," said Fred to Wilbur, after he had congratulated him, "for Bernard McCafrey hastening away from Gold Valley so suddenly."

"Yes," replied Wilbur. "I could not think of having the ceremony take place without my old friend and associate 'Barney' being present. He is surely one of nature's noblemen. We have traveled together so long in adversity, as well as prosperity, that we are almost inseparable."

"He is a fine man," said Fred. "His disinterested assistance and help I have recently seen demonstrated in a very marked degree."

"He is of the salt of the earth," replied Wilbur. "Not only is he a sunny-day friend, but one in the hour of need. By the way," he continued, "I want to congratulate you with all my heart on the great Shonbar strike."

"Thank you," said Fred. "Prosperity could not have come at a more opportune time. My

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finances were reduced to the last dollar, when Mr. Hilliard broke into the ore chute."

"I received your letter written some ten days ago," said Winthrop, "and have sold those twenty-five lots your New York friends purchased."

"Thank heaven for that!" replied Fred.

"Yes, I sold them for eight hundred dollars each, or twenty thousand dollars all told. As they paid only twenty-five hundred for them, I scarcely think they will complain.

"You have no idea what a city Waterville has become. The water power has been effectually harnessed, some of the streets are paved, electric car lines, planing-mills, and scores of other enterprises are in full operation. Our population is now numbered by thousands, instead of hundreds, while activity and prosperity are apparent on every hand. Waterville's improvement during the last year has certainly been almost miraculous."

"You astonish me, old fellow," replied Fred. "But I need no greater proof of Waterville's growth than your report on the sale of the lots belonging to my New York friends, and to think, old fellow, I gave you my promise to wait patiently a few years before passing judgment on your enterprise. Less than half the time I counted upon has elapsed, yet you must know that I am better satisfied with Waterville than I ever dared hope."

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"Thank you," said Winthrop. "Your 'Two Honorable Exceptions' article in the *New York Banner* was prophetic."

"Yes," laughed Fred, "while the prophecies of Colonel Alexander, John Pilcher, General Ira House, Tom Lee and other members of your Waterville Town Company have been more than fulfilled."

"My associates," said Wilbur, "in the great work of building up Waterville, have at last met with a compensation which I cannot regard as other than a just one. Taking it all in all, they are a grand lot of fellows, each a study within himself, collectively a tower of strength. They belong to a class who are the builders of our nation—the advance guard, the 'pathfinders' of a mightier civilization coming after."

"By the way," he continued, "it was my noble little wife, Virginia, that started the boom last Spring. She learned in some mysterious way that a private school fund had been created for her special benefit, and in order to return the money she purchased the first lots we had sold for months, and from that day the excitement started. Well, you'll have to see the place to appreciate the wonderful changes and improvements."

"Bless her heart," said Fred, "she is a dear girl."

"Well, I rather think so," assented Wilbur,

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laughing. "I still consider her the most practical member of the Hilliard family."

"And I beg to assure you that my opinion in regard to Ruth remains unchanged."

"I notice," said Wilbur, "that our old friend, J. Arthur Boast, has had quite a rise in the world; at the head of the Peacock mine, I understand."

"Yes," said Fred, while a sorrowful expression swept over his face, "I fear his rise precedes a mighty fall. Gibbons and Casey have been arrested for the Grim murder, but have given bonds, and are waiting for their attorney, John Pilcher, and, to use one of Gibbons' expressions, 'things are liable to be sizzlin' hot for Boast before long'."

"Why," interrupted Wilbur, "you cannot mean——"

"Yes," continued Fred. "I do mean that Arthur Boast murdered Rufus Grim. I have the evidence. Marc Casey and an old miner friend of his saw the act."

"You astonish me."

"Casey," said Fred, "was at first afraid to report the matter, nor did he until he went to Waterville. You were away at the time and he confided in McCaffrey. His own and Gibbons' long years of warfare over the ownership of the Peacock mine, he feared, would cause the people to suspect them of the crime. He divined rightly about the matter."

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There is a great prejudice against both of them, but it will soon be cleared away."

"I'm certainly surprised," said Wilbur. "I never liked the fellow, for he was always praising himself, and when a man begins to tell me how good he is I always feel like sending for a bodyguard and insisting that no blank cartridges be used. But I really had no idea that he would commit murder."

The next day a warrant was issued for the arrest of J. Arthur Boast. A most diligent search was made, but the officer was unable to find him.

His wife was prostrated with grief and declared she had no idea of his whereabouts. Poor Helen, with all her frailties and failings, was paying doubly for her transgressions. The natural laws of the physical world are merciless, inexorable; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, are their doctrines, while compensation, even to the pound of flesh, is exacted. Burn the candle at both ends if you will, but painfully, or peacefully, pay the price, for it will be demanded of peasant, prince or potentate without distinction.

Helen was the one infatuation of Arthur Boast's life, and while he was not clever enough to hide from her the weak link in the chain of his career, yet in the crisis she bravely endeavored to cover his defects with a mask of protecting cleverness.

It was the morning after Thanksgiving that

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Fred received the following letter from J. Arthur Boast:

AT HOME.

Dear Sir:

Why I write you above all others is more than I can tell. An impulse, prompted by some wandering spirit from the region of darkness and the damned, forces me to it. The things I want to do, I am unable to accomplish. The acts I loathe and abhor I am made a catspaw of to perform by some unknown impelling force.

It may be that some men can shape their own destiny; unfortunately, it is not so with me.

If hope has its inspiration in heaven, hatred has its foundation in hell, and I have never known the time I did not both hate and fear you. I sought your friendship for protection. When I needed your support, you turned against me.

Rufus Grim was an evil genius during his lifetime, and he is more unbearable dead than living. Every night since I murdered him—yes, it was I who did the deed—he has visited me in my dreams. All night long he walks up and down my bedroom—back and forth—and curses me. Sometimes I pull the cover well over my head and entice sleep for a moment, but he drags it off, rubs his cold, clammy, fat hands about my face, and I awake in shuddering fright. He has also found out that I robbed the stage and bribed the sheriff, and tortures me on those scores.

To live is to suffer, and I am tired of it all. I have not slept for ten nights. My brain is on fire.

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You want vengeance, but I intend to cheat you—yes, I will cheat you—and in this I find my only consolation.

An hour ago my attorney came to my hiding-place and told me the higher court had reversed the decision as to the ownership of the Peacock mine. When this is known, all Gold Valley will turn against me. Even now I can hear them hissing the words, “Scoundrel!” “Murderer!”

My ambition has always been to be wealthy. Now, I am so poor that if I continued to live and was not hunted down and sent to prison, I should not have even a crust of bread.

Gibbons and Casey are the owners of the Peacock mine; the higher court has so decided. With their money they will join you in persecuting me, but I'll cheat them, as well as you. Your longing for revenge shall not be satisfied.

I have but one sorrow—Helen.

At the old prospect shaft on the Peacock, where I struck the fatal blow that hurled Rufus Grim into eternity, you will find the remains of the persecuted, despised and hated

J. ARTHUR BOAST.

To Fred Rockwell.

Fred was shocked beyond measure at the terrible tragedy of a life that was told in this letter. A search was at once made and the body found near the old prospect shaft. A bullet wound in his temple and the weapon still clutched in the dead man's hand told of this maniac's suicide.

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The people of Gold Valley fairly gasped at the rapidity with which events were occurring in the midst of their little community. The sheriff was missing, and his absence gave color to the statement in the letter Boast had written.

Casey and Gibbons, the multi-millionaires, were now the undisputed owners of the Peacock mine, and were entirely vindicated of any complicity in the murder of Rufus Grim by the suicide's letter. The citizens of Gold Valley suddenly remembered that Mr. Marc Casey and Mr. Gideon Gibbons were most excellent gentlemen. It was astonishing to find how many friends flocked around them to tender their congratulations.

"Gee whiz, Gideon," said Marc Casey, one evening, nudging him with his elbow, "the worst we are gittin' these days is certainly the best of it, as I may have said before."

A few evenings after the funeral of J. Arthur Boast, Fred was sitting in the Hilliard home with the members of the family.

They were talking over the success of the Shonbar mine, and Mr. Hilliard, in a subdued, yet satisfied way, thanked God that he had been permitted to live to see the fulfillment of his life's dream.

Both Virginia and Ruth were animated and happy, and Wilbur Winthrop had been dilating upon the prosperity of Waterville.

The door opened and Aunt Phoebe came in. "Good evenin', Mr. Rockwell," she said, with her rich Southern accent. "I think this is the happiest day of our lives."

"Yes, indeed," replied Fred. "We owe your brother many apologies for our seeming lack of confidence in the Shonbar."

She looked at him in quick surprise over her glasses and then replied: "Lack of confidence, Mr. Rockwell? I would like to know who lacked confidence in my brother Benjamin's mine? For myself, I have believed from the first that Benjamin would strike it, if I could only keep him workin' away long enough."

Fred was surprised into silence, and was trying to think of a reply, when Mr. Hilliard interposed. "You see, suh," he said, with a knowing twinkle in his eye, "I have often observed to you that my sister is a most remarkable woman, suh; most remarkable. She has been a powerful support to me in my minin' efforts."

This seemed partially to pacify Aunt Phoebe, as she said: "I suspect, Mr. Rockwell, you are thinkin' of a conversation we had some months ago in regard to sinkin' the shaft. Of cou'se you don't know how much strategy I had to resort to, that I might keep Benjamin from growin' disheartened. I will not allow anyone to say anything against my

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brother, but, personally, I know he is the contrariest man livin', he is, indeed, suh! Time and again I have been forced to pretend that I was opposin' him, just to make him go on workin' and sinkin' that shaft, but that is all over with, and I have much to be thankful for that I was spared that I might keep on naggin' and spurrin' him on, until finally his efforts have been rewarded."

She did not wait for a reply or comments, and soon after, tenderly embracing Virginia and Ruth, retired.

When she had gone, Mr. Hilliard looked up from the fire into which he had been gazing long and steadily. "I presume, Mr. Rockwell, that my sister, without question, is one of the greatest characters that ever lived. I'm discoverin', even to this day, new traits of superiority and strength in her. Indeed, suh, she is no ordinary woman. Though born in the South and possessin' in a very high degree the beautiful refinement peculiar to our Southern women, yet at the same time her diplomacy in accomplishin' great results equals the shrewdest Nawthern Yankee. She is indeed a most remarkable woman, suh; most remarkable!"

A little later Wilbur and Virginia retired, pleading weariness. "Do you know," said Mr. Hilliard, as they made ready to retire, "since our great discovery I want to do all my sleepin' in the mornin'."

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"Thinking over his good fortune keeps daddy so busy that retiring early is out of the question," explained Ruth. "But, my, how late he does sleep!"

"He has justly earned the rest he claims," interposed Fred.

"Indeed, he has," said Ruth, approaching her father and pushing back his long white locks. "You are a dear daddy, and may sit up as late as you like, and sleep as long as you wish."

"I tell you, Mr. Rockwell," said Mr. Hilliard, rising and standing before the fire, "this little girl of mine is bound to spoil me. She always did humor me, ever since I can remember, and she's worse now than ever before. Well, you will have to excuse me until I have another pipe of tobacco."

His suit of black made a strange contrast, Fred thought, to the miner's garb he had worn so many years. He went into the room, known as his "den," for a smoke, and Fred and Ruth were alone for the first time since their momentary interview in the printing-office.

A doubt came into Fred's mind, whether he was glad they had struck it in the Shonbar or not. He wondered if she remembered his sealed letter. Heretofore Ruth, whom he had loved so long, had, in a measure, been dependent upon his bounty, but now it was different—the last blast had made them, in a

THE BUILDERS

way, financial equals. He thought he detected a restraint in her conversation, and it was embarrassing and painful. What if she refused him? Cross-cutting only to find a pinched-out vein of ore would be as nothing compared with such a disappointment. He would exist, but what would life be without her? If she cared for him, loved him, this night he must know.

At his request for a song, she went towards the piano, pausing at the table and opening a book from which she took a faded, but still odorous, boutonniere of violets. She looked at the souvenir only a moment, and then walked quickly to the instrument. No word was spoken—but he knew the seal of his letter had been broken.

She never sang with more feeling. Her heart was filled with a maiden's dearest happiness—a deep and abiding love for the man who was listening.

A SONG

Hope once whispered to a heart,
Worn with waiting, long and long;
Lips that e'er had dwelt apart
Then were wedded in a song.

Hope then whispered to a love
Timid as a forest fawn;
A white spirit from above,
List'ning, spoke, and fear was gone.

A T L A S T !

Hope then kissed Time's hand and prayed
That upon this twain it rest,
Gently as a rare rose laid
On a maiden's happy breast.

With a woman's intuition she well knew that Fred's love belonged to her alone. She sang with the rapture of a wild bird of the Western hills, in notes rich, sweet and laden with melody.

Fred listened with bated breath. There are pleasures so keen they are painful. "I am not worthy," he thought, with unselfish humility. "But happiness without her is impossible." She ceased playing and turned her radiant face towards him. A momentary silence followed.

"Ruth," said Fred, with a tremulous note in his voice, notwithstanding he tried to crush it into naturalness, "surely you know ere this that I love you."

He had risen and was walking slowly back and forth before the open grate, as if, in his loyalty, he refused to permit the physical to influence the judgment of this noble girl.

"Please do not look away," he pleaded. "I know my unworthiness, but do not—well, pretend you are unconscious of it tonight. I would rather love you, Ruth, even without hope, than to have the unselfish devotion of any other woman in all the world. Do not ask me why—I only know it is so."

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For a moment she lifted her hands to her face, protectingly, as if fearful he would see the great happiness depicted there, and, yet—he must know—know of her love for him, or she would be miserable forever.

“What I have said,” Fred went on, “may be nothing to you, but it seems either life or death to me. Life to love’s pathway, or death to a cherished hope. Understand, I will not lose interest in the world, or go to the bad, or do any foolish sort of thing, even if you send me away from you. It is said that some men are willing to be entertained at vaudeville, when they are denied the opportunity of grand opera—I am not one of them. I hope—very much—that I make myself clear. All the world and all its people, men and women, hold less fascination for me than your own dear self.

“Tomorrow I shall leave Gold Valley forever, unless you wish me to remain, and, well—if you should ask me—not to go—I’ll understand.”

Fred stood before the fire, still and motionless. After a brief silence Ruth raised her eyes and saw his face, pale with anxiety—he was standing on the boundary—at the parting of the ways, awaiting his commission.

She rose from the piano—her cheeks flushed pink as roses, and came a step forward, then paused.

Her golden hair reflected the firelight and made

A T L A S T !

a halo about her girlish face. Her full red lips parted with the tender smile of youth and happiness. She was thinking: "I am certain of his love. I am sure of my love for him, and I will give myself entirely, yes, wholly into his keeping."

She held out her hands to Fred and said: "Please do not go!" Her voice was one of entreaty, yet low and musical.

In a moment he was by her side and pressed her hands passionately to his lips. In the ecstasy of love's triumph his arms stole quickly about her, while her head rested contentedly on his breast, her violet eyes, moistened with the dew of a great happiness, looked up into his, and two sincere souls were mingled by love's sacred kiss.

A moment later the curtains parted and Mr. Hilliard stood before them. His long white hair fell from his temples and there was a glorified look of gladness on his face. He lifted his hands upward and in tones scarcely audible, said: "Such tender and sacred things of earth are sanctified in Heaven."

The shuttle of fate had again woven into the web of destiny the better attributes of a manly man and the ennobling love of a gentle woman.

THE END.

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